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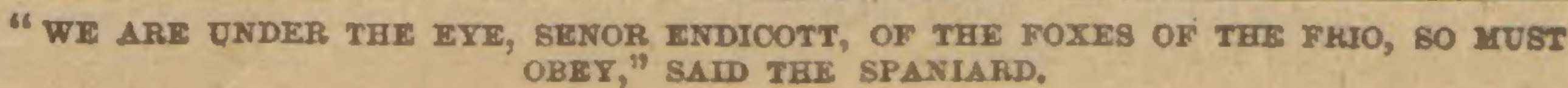
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He was dressed with exquisite taste and richness, even though on a ride through a wild country, and diamonds glittered in his shirt-front and upon the little finger of his left hand, for he wore no glove upon that hand, carrying it in his belt.

He was armed with a gem-hilted knife and a pair of revolvers, and his Mexican saddle and bridle were heavy with silver ornaments.

His companion was younger by several years, possessed an equally fine physique, and a face that was strangely fascinating—a face that no woman should trust, and yet one to win a woman's love from its very manly beauty.

He was attired in a stylish riding-suit, with top-boots, gauntlet gloves and a soft black hat, and he sat well in his saddle.

Like his companion he was also armed, and both men were splendidly mounted.

Suddenly the Spaniard drew rein, while his eyes fell upon a slip of paper pinned upon a tree which had been scathed by lightning.

In a deep voice, and with a slight accent the Mexican read aloud what was written upon the paper, as follows:

"LEAVE THE GOLD HERE IN THE HOLLOW OF THIS TREE.

"IF YOU DO NOT DO SO A SIGNAL WILL BE MADE TO THOSE IN CHARGE OF THE SENORITA, AND YOUR COMING WILL BE IN VAIN. F. OF F."

"We are under the eye, Senor Endicott, of the Foxes of the Frio, so must obey," said the Spaniard.

"It seems so, sir, and we can do nothing else," was the reply of the American, and as he spoke he took from either side of his saddle, where they were secured, two leather bags that evidently contained gold, for they were very heavy.

These were placed in the hollow of the lightning-riven tree, and then the two horsemen rode on.

They had not gone very far before they came upon a scene which brought them to a halt.

In a thicket, growing about a spring, there were five horsemen and one horsewoman, and that the latter was a captive there was no doubt.

"There's our game, Senor American, now to the rescue!" cried the Spaniard and, as he spoke, he placed a black mask over his face.

The American horseman did not cover up his face, and both men, with a ringing cry, sent their horses forward at full speed, directly upon the group in the thicket.

There were revolver-shots in quick succession, shouts, the fall of a man from his horse, then down went the Spaniard, followed by another of the group in the thicket, and the next moment the American was alongside the horse upon which the maiden was mounted, his hand seized her bridle-rein, and he dashed away, turning in his saddle and firing again as he did so, and at the crack of his pistol a man dropped to the ground.

"James Endicott, you here?"

"You the man to so daringly rescue me from those outlaws?" and the words came in excited tones from the lips of the maiden, as her horse bounded along by the side of the animal ridden by the rescuer.

"Yes, Dolores, I came to Texas for my health, and learned only to-day that you were here, the captive of the Foxes of the Frio, so I came to your rescue," was the modest response.

"And bravely have you served me; but, who told you I was a captive?"

"My good friend, Don Quevedo, a Spaniard and a ranchero, whom you saw fall by my side."

"Oh, Endicott, can you do nothing for him?"

"No; my duty is to save you, for there are other bandits in the chaparrals; but, have no fear, sweet cousin, for I will protect you with my life."

Hardly had the words been uttered when, out of the chaparral upon their right, dashed several wild-looking horsemen.

They opened fire as they came on, and one shot brought down the horse ridden by the maiden.

She landed on her feet, however, and was unhurt, while her companion, in strange contrast to his daring behavior of a short while before, put spurs to his steed to fly.

"Save me! do not leave me!" came in pleading tones from the lady.

But the man was deaf to her cries, and dashed away like the wind, leaving the fair girl to once more fall a captive into the hands of the Foxes of the Frio.

But, suddenly, there came the clatter of hoofs, and a horseman appeared, riding furiously along the trail.

It was the Spaniard who had fallen from his horse in the first attack, and he still wore his black mask.

With a revolver in either hand, the masked horseman came on, and the outlaws fled in terror, leaving the maiden standing by the side of her dead horse!

"Come, senorita, your hand, and I will place you behind me," cried the Spaniard, and he raised the lady to a seat behind his saddle with remarkable ease, while he again dashed on.

"Senor, again I owe you a great service; but I feared you had been killed."

"No, senorita, I was but stunned by a bullet, and recovering consciousness, came on after you, to find that your cousin had deserted you."

"Coward!" and she fairly hissed the word in her scorn of the man who had left her to her fate.

"He so proved himself; but, senorita, I must again take you to my ranch, until I can see my way clear to carry you into San Antonio without danger."

"You know best, sir; but, where did you find James Endicott?"

"I met him in San Antonio, senorita, and, referring to you, he said that you were his kinswoman, and begged me to aid him in your rescue."

"We went to my ranch, and my man there, Valas, told me that the chief of the Foxes of the Frio had taken you away, so we followed, with the result you know."

"But, have no fear, senorita, for you shall soon be free, and believe me always your friend."

"I cannot but so believe you, sir," was the answer, and soon after the two reached a cabin, where the Spaniard left the lady in the care of a Mexican man and woman, while he rode rapidly back along the trail he had come.

A ride of half an hour brought him to the lightning-scathed tree, and quietly removing the bags of gold which the American had placed in the hollow, he fastened them to his saddle and rode away at a canter.

The trail that he took led him into San Antonio, soon after nightfall, and in a few minutes more he was seated at a table in a comfortable room of the Menger House, counting over the gold he had taken from the hollow in the tree.

"Yes, the amount is correct, and all is mine."

"After his cowardly flight, Senor Endicott will not dare remain in San Antonio, so I will go to-morrow and bring the beautiful Dolores here, and if I cannot win her love, then I do not know my powers."

"Yes, she shall be mine," and the set lips of the man showed that he meant all that he said.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERY.

It was a lonely house on the side of a little ridge, there glorified by the name of hill, and looking toward the never lonely Atlantic.

The dwelling stood but a couple of hundred yards from the sea; and its windows looked out, upon three sides, over alternate fields and sand ridges, without a single tree to relieve the eye. Only a very unclassical-looking tower and a score or two of low, unpainted houses, a mile or two to the north, and which indicated the little town of Indianola, gave evidence of anything like human life behind it.

In a scene like this, nature seems, as in the earlier ages, the great all-potent ruler.

And so it is always, though man, in the pride of his heart, is apt to imagine it otherwise.

Sky, sea, and land fill the world; while human beings amount to so little in the abstract, that they are scarce worthy to be taken into the account. Feeble at best they are, a scarcely noticeable minority, whose scattered dwelling-places seem but the little heaps of earth thrown up by ants.

But on the afternoon of a glorious January day, even Matagorda Bay, that secluded arm of the mighty Méxique Sea, could not look dreary. The sky was one vast turquoise; the sea, one mass of liquid malachite. Not a white cloud was on the one, nor a white sail on the other. The sun had for hours been undisputed monarch in the heavens; a long dazzling bridge of light had ruled the great waste of waters.

The yellow beach had been deepened in hue by the golden sunshine, and the distant hills to the west were in a purple haze. There was a deep lulling murmur in the air, the moaning of waves, as they broke upon the distant coral reefs.

Through the long day, the world had been as if asleep; but as eventide approached, the siesta came to an end.

A sudden squall from the neighboring gulf, a quick rush of cumulus clouds and the quiet scene but now so softly steeped in the flow of the declining sun, became dark and murky and threatening.

A dismal, pouring evening was now the one thing certain in prospective. The view, on every side, was hidden by mist. The rain came at the first slanting from low, trailing clouds, and the late afternoon of that tropic land put on the garb of a northern twilight. Soon this was changed to the gloom of night and the heavy dash of a rain that came from every point of the heavens.

Scooping as he ran, his light palmetto hat, but frail protection at the best, pulled low over his forehead, and his face bent before the wind and rain, was now seen a figure that, from the springiness of its step, must belong to one in full possession of those exclusive attributes of youth, strength and agility.

But a few minutes before, he had been strolling carelessly along the beach, indifferent to

everything but the beauty of the ever-changing sea.

He was a young man of five and twenty, and of about the average height, with an athletic, well-set figure. In complexion he was fresh and boyish, and therefore scarcely to be mistaken for one whose days had been spent under a tropic sky.

But youthful as was his face, it was full of remarkable force and intellect, and there was a happy, easy consciousness of power in his every movement. Up to the present time one watching Vivian Fairfax would have said that his mere presence would have made the gloomiest scene a cheerful one. But, to see him now, the inevitable exception to every rule would have to be conceded.

"I must say I like this," he muttered *sotto voce*, as he dashed madly onward through the darkness and tempest. If the words were not uttered in something like a Pickwickian sense, the likes and dislikes of Mr. Vivian Fairfax must have been among those things that are past finding out.

But as there was not even the apology of a shelter anywhere short of the most vigorous half-hour's run, and experience had taught the young man that these rains, thus suddenly coming up, seldom exceeded that in duration, he might as well have proved his alleged liking for it by taking it at least philosophically and sparing himself this mad feat of pedestrianism which could profit him nothing.

It took but a little time to prove this. The rage of the elements soon spent itself, and the sand dunes far off, as well as near, began to be seen through the veil of liquid, tremulous clearness.

Inland to the north and west the mist rolled away in rounded clouds, bright as silver, and soft as the down of the cottonwood. South and east the sea, beneath the now brightening sky of sunset had no longer the heavy-clouded ultramarine of the morning, but the delicate translucent turquoise, the deep blue silken sheen of the neck of a dove. Far down the coast, where the sun had been sooner visible, was as a sea of glass mingled with a white electric blaze.

"That wakes a man up," was the emphatic soliloquy of the young man, as he halted and drew a long breath. It would have been strange indeed if it had not some such effect. Vivian Fairfax would have been constituted differently indeed from everything except the amphibious in nature, if the effect upon him had been a soporific one.

But his next words explained it. The exclamation had been more in the nature of a devout thanksgiving.

"Hanged if a few days more like those we've been having lately wouldn't have thrown me into a slumber likely to last as long as old Rip Van Winkle's! This sojourning in a land 'where it is always afternoon,' is all very well for lotus-eaters and all that sort of thing; but, for a fellow who must be up and doing, with a heart for any fate, he might as well be dead and done with."

"This last week's work is all very fine, but it isn't finding Jim Endicott. And if I am not improving the shining hours in the laudable effort of paying off my accumulated indebtedness to that noble scion of an illustrious old Bay State house, I had better have remained in Gotham."

"There are three things, so I have always heard, that bring a man to Texas—health, wealth, and running off with another man's wife. Numbers one and two I certainly can't complain of the lack of, and number three I just as certainly don't hanker after, so I must be an exception to the rule."

"Be it so, the pursuit may be an ignoble one; but, all the same, it is revenge that is condemned by moralists, and my mission is revenge in the concrete. None of them, I fancy, have had my experience. Few of them have ever dreamed of such a serpent in human form as James Endicott."

"Well, here I am! And here I have been in this gorgeous Lone Star State for more than a week, and the opening to my life's work has not yet presented itself. But the clouds must clear, and when they do—"

He paused abruptly. The clouds had cleared away, the storm had passed, the last rays of the setting sun fell upon the young man's path and disclosed the beginning of the end.

To the right and before, where he walked, was the sea. Far out the reefs of coral lay, veined like marble, beneath the green, calm waters of the bay; nearer at hand, the white waves foamed upon the glittering wet sands.

But it was none of these that broke in upon the soliloquy of Vivian Fairfax.

A young lady, her face turned from him, sat on a fragment of the wreck of a fishing-boat in front of him. Had the young man kept on directly in the path which he had been pursuing, she must have risen to allow him to pass, for he had been rushing up to the time that the lull in the storm had permitted him to pause and since then in his slower pace, with his eyes upon the sand, directly for the projecting piece of spar, upon which she was seated.

It was not want of politeness that prevented,

in Vivian Fairfax, the customary raising of the hat and the conventional "I beg your pardon." Nevertheless, gentleman though he was, he stood and gazed.

That she had been seated in that precise spot through the entire mad gust of wind and rain amid which he had been battling, was quite apparent. Yet she was in no wise disconcerted. The embarrassment was clearly all on the side of the gentleman.

This soon passed, however, and a sensation somewhat akin to amusement took its place.

Vivian now removed his dripping Panama, and said pleasantly, but politely:

"Excuse me; but we seem to be fellow sufferers."

He said no more. He could have said nothing more had his life depended upon it.

The young lady—for she was young—was regarding him, not as though she resented his abruptness, but with a cold and impassive face. Apparently he was even more an object of indifference to her than was the wreck upon which she was seated.

She arose without a word, bowed, without even a glance, caught up her dragged skirt, and went directly along the winding path among the sand-hills, toward the cottage on the ridge.

There was a grace in the movement, that even her air of icy indifference—ice, which the beating of rain had failed to dissolve in the least, could not deprive her of. There was a beauty in face and form which, if anything, enhanced by the same trying experience; even as the lily after the shower, fairer, purer and lovelier.

Vivian Fairfax stood looking after her.

"By Jupiter's ghost!" he muttered. "It's always safest, even in a storm or shipwreck, I believe, to wait to be introduced; and, blessed if I don't do it in the future!"

"She can't belong here, surely. Wonder where she is staying? Somewhere in Indianola, of course; but no, at that house in the distance. I might have known it. She is heading there now."

On he went, slowly and thoughtfully, this time in the direction of the town. Evidently the thoughts of the young New Yorker had been suddenly turned into another channel. The object of his Texas trip, at which he had not indistinctly hinted just now, was for the time being forgotten.

A change had come over "The Spirit of his Dream," if not the whole tenor of his life.

Was this incident so trivial and by no means out of the way, to turn him from a seeming scheme of vengeance; or was it to prove, in some mysterious way, the tide to that end which a relentless fate would force him to take at the flood? He halted again to catch one glance, the last of the form now vanishing among the sand-dunes to his left.

"The oddest thing of all," he thought, as he continued his walk, "is that she was not in the least frightened—not even startled; she was simply indifferent; and no acting about it at that."

"Upon my word, she impressed me as though it was nothing to her, whatever happened; as though life wasn't worth a picayune to her. Deuced queer that! Queer how any one can get to feel so, even in this dreamy solitude."

Our young friend had forgotten for the moment that the same silent seductions of nature, he had but just admitted, had been weaning him from the object that had brought him hither.

"She must have had the full benefit of that drenching," he continued, "same as I did; but she took it more coolly, by a large majority. All the same, I hope the fair creature won't take cold. I begin to have premonitions of a chill myself—fever and ager; as they say in the Jarneys—so I must hurry for dry linen, and other necessary precautions."

"Which way had she been walking, I wonder? To the village and back probably."

As Vivian ventured on the surmise, he saw, lying before him, a small square of cambric edged with delicate lace. The latter fact induced him to rescue it from the shallow pool of water in the sand, where it lay. The pretty kerchief belonged to a lady beyond a doubt, and but one lady was in his mind as he unfolded it.

At that moment he almost literally ran upon a Texan youth who was employed in the tavern at which he was staying.

"Sam," he said, crushing the wet kerchief in his hand, "do you know if any lady is stopping at that house on the ridge?" pointing over his shoulder as he spoke.

"I reckon," was the youth's laconic reply.

"Belong there?"

"Nary time; Yankee, I've hearn tell. Come on ther No'th Star a fort'n't ago."

"Oh she did! You never heard her name I suppose?"

"I see'd it though," said the intelligent native, grinning as he spoke, and taking an old envelope from his pocket.

"Picked this hyer up, es I fellered her out'n ther pos'-office."

The wrapper was somewhat the worse for wear, but the address was still legible:

"MISS DOLORES DAVENANT."

Vivian Fairfax, as he walked on, unfolded the handkerchief. In one corner it was marked:

"DOLLY."

CHAPTER II.

"ALL THAT A MAN HATH, WILL HE GIVE FOR HIS LIFE."

OLD ADRIAN DAVENANT was dead at last, and no one on earth regretted it.

His wife, happily for her, had preceded him among the silent majority by several years—so many, in fact, that her children had ceased to have more than a dim and shadowy recollection of her—and of those who remained, and were what the world calls *near* to him, none had been to any real extent *dear* to him.

He was missed of course, by his son and daughter, at the first.

Dolores, now a young lady of twenty,

"A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair,"

really believed for a time that she sincerely regretted him; but even with her there soon came a vague and almost startling sense of rest when no longer came the harsh, rasping voice, with the incessant "Dolly"—no intonation conveying the idea of a pet name—and then, when she appeared in answer to the peremptory summons pelting her with sarcastic and unkind speeches until she felt deaf and dazed.

Dare Davenant was two years his sister's senior, but his health had been for years so delicate that he had become in a great measure dependent upon her; consequently he could scarcely now be regarded as the head of the family, except in a mere nominal sense.

Adrian Davenant had loved his son, in a way that was essentially his own. He had been an intensely selfish man all his days, and this, his ruling passion, had grown with his growth and strengthened with his weakness.

He regarded Dare as something peculiarly his own—probably in a sense his most valued earthly possession, and he prized the boy accordingly. But he was not blind to the reciprocal state of things, notwithstanding. He had sense enough to see that his son, while he had a wholesome fear, and a certain degree of respect for the author of his being, had no great love for him; and though the shrewd old man could easily see why this should be the case, he was yet deeply and decidedly jealous of any attachment which Dare might form.

It was for this reason, that, when the young man was ordered by his physicians to a milder climate than that of New York, as the one hope of prolonging his life, his father positively and absolutely refused his consent. He could not endure the thought that Dare should in any such way be weaned from him. Absence in his case, could hardly be expected to make the heart grow fonder, unless it were of some one else; and Adrian Davenant had begun to almost hate his daughter from the knowledge that had come to him intuitively that she was first in the affection of his son.

But all this was over now. The old man had passed away, his hand holding Dare's and his glazing eyes fixed lovingly upon him to the last.

In this life he had received his consolation. But people must not expect to have everything in this world. If a man indulges his tongue and his temper, and his innate selfishness to the full, while he is alive, he must not look to have, in addition, the luxury of being sincerely mourned when he is dead.

The ruling passion of Old Davenant had been paramount to the last. His entire estate variously estimated at from a quarter to a half million dollars, he bequeathed to his only son; leaving to Dolores a mere pittance in the way of life annuity to be paid by Dare, and which strange to say was to be doubled, in the event of the young girl's marriage.

The object was, beyond a doubt, to hold out, in this way, an inducement to his daughter to marry; that, thus, the tie between her and her brother might be weakened. Thus did the father's insane jealousy seek to carry its influence when he was no longer capable of being moved by it.

In the event of the death of Dare Davenant without direct heirs, the property was to descend, not to his sister, but to a distant relative. This was a young Bostonian, whose mother was a first cousin of Adrian Davenant, but whom he had seldom seen, and who was believed to be his pet aversion.

The young man, however, was the nearest male heir after his own son, and there was with all the Davenants a kind of stubborn and stupid hereditary sense of justice which showed itself in that direction.

Dare Davenant, invalid though he was, was yet full of hopes and ambitions; and, as he turned away from the grave of his father, the old man who had finished a long life and had in many ways made the worst of it, he was considering with himself what he meant to do.

"All this has been very trying for you, Dolly," he said, in his kind, brotherly way, when they were once more in their home and

alone; "much more trying for you than for me."

Dolly Davenant had sunk into a chair without removing any of her sable wrappings, and sat there looking the picture of grief and loneliness.

A funeral is a sad and painful thing to the survivors always, even when they cannot feel much sadness on account of the dead.

"But you must not worry your precious little head in regard to the future," her brother continued.

Dolly knew to what he referred. Their father's will had already been made public.

"As if I cared for that," she said.

"You need not, Dolly. There are only ourselves, and for myself I hope there may never be any more."

"Are you thinking of the additional annuity you will be forced to pay, in the event of my taking a different view of it?"

She spoke with a smile, which would come in spite of the dreariness of their present surroundings, when she thought of the provision her father had made for her.

Dare smiled also, and took a seat in front of her.

"As to your income, Dolly," he said, "everything that is mine is yours. As I said just now, there are only us two—not a soul belonging to us for whom we need care in the least. There is that comfort always in being left alone as we are. There are no worrying relatives who may fancy they have a right to interfere with either of us. We are everything to each other, and not a soul can come between us."

"But this precious New England cousin of ours!"

"Who is now in Europe, and may never return."

"I heard only the other day that he had returned."

"To New York! Impossible! He would surely have been at the funeral in that case."

"No, in Boston," said Dolly. "He may not have heard of poor papa's death; or, if he has, can have no idea that it affects him in the least."

"Nor does it."

"No, to be sure; only in the event of—"

"Of my death," you would say.

His sister was silent.

"Why so grave, Dolly? It does not look like such a very remote contingency—is that what you think?"

"Dare," said the young girl, how I wish that Doctor Parker's suggestion had been carried out, in your case. You have not been growing stronger, the last year or two. I cannot disguise the fact from myself."

"You are a first-class alarmist," and the young man forced a laugh.

"I hope not, I am sure," was the reply, "though perhaps my anxiety on your account does make me magnify affairs a little. But, Dare, you know what the physicians have always said; and your experience the past winter."

"Don't mention it, please!"

"Well, we'll allude to the coming one."

"Sufficient to the day, Dolly."

"Is the evil thereof. Just so, Dare; it is the evil that I am thinking of."

"Well, give us the benefit of your thoughts, sister mine."

"I think," answered Dolly, "now that affairs are different with you—"

"The governor no longer here to oppose it, you mean?"

"For shame, Dare! I would suggest that, as soon as matters here have been somewhat arranged, you would lose no time in acting upon the doctor's repeated advice, and—"

"Expatriate myself. Thanks, very much! But, I have no fancy, as it happens, of being buried alive."

"Nor I, Dare, for seeing you buried the other way."

"Dolly, you are getting morbid."

"I am only serious," and she looked so.

"You look so, indeed," was the reply; "and, what is more, you will make me so, if you keep on."

"I would have you take that view of it."

"Very good; let us have yours, to begin with."

"Dare, several times during our poor father's last sickness have his physicians spoken to me in regard to you. They seemed, somehow, to think that I was the elder of the two—"

"Complimentary, that, Miss Dolly, was it not?"

"I don't mind it, in the least. At all events, they were under the impression that I might have some influence over you—"

"Which you have, you know."

"Thank you. And which I ought by all means to exercise now. That is all."

"But say, sis, did they *really* think there is anything much the matter with me?"

"While they didn't speak as though they apprehended anything serious, at present, they yet all agreed that, if longer neglected, they would not be answerable for the consequence."

"Nor would they, in any event, as I have never consulted them."

"They meant it kindly, Dare."

"I don't doubt it. There are three things,

you know, of which it can be truly said, that there is more pleasure in giving than in receiving; namely, kicks, medicine and advice," and the young man arose from his seat and walked to the further end of the suite of apartments. The conversation with his sister had evidently troubled him.

He drew the heavy curtains back from a west window and looked out. The brief December daylight was fading. It had been one of those days of pale and placid sunshine which sometimes slide in softly between weeks of wintry rain and wind. The sun was now setting behind massive battlements of purple cloud which seemed to foretell a gathering storm. Faint films of crimson seemed combed out against the zenith, and a wild yellow light was reflected on the restless, gleaming Hudson, and on the long line of Jersey headlands. There was no foliage visible to relieve the eye—nothing that could speak of summer and a resurrection. The trees were dry and dead-looking, and there was a melancholy rustle in the rising wind.

Everything without seemed to tell of decay and death, and the passing away of every hope and brightness.

Dare Davenant was saddened. That one sweeping glance had taken in as it were, a whole prophet's roll of gloomy forebodings as to his own future. He let the curtain fall, with the air of one who had been given a momentary glimpse of the supernatural. It had been enough for him.

Always nervous and imaginative, it was now some minutes before Dare could control himself sufficiently to return to his seat. Not for worlds would he have permitted his more self-contained sister to see how unmanned he had become.

When at last the young man turned away, and took up the subject where they had left it, his face was as bright as though he had been viewing the most attractive scene in the gay metropolis.

"Well, Dolores," he said, throwing himself carelessly upon a divan; "whereabouts did you leave off in those gloomy prophecies of yours?"

"I had finished, Dare," said the sister.

"Just so. And like Shakespeare you never repeat."

"I might, perhaps ought to say, that Doctor Galen gave it as his *ultimatum*—the girl hesitated."

"I know," said her brother, "it is the old story—"

"Troy burns or else let Helen go!"

"Helen meaning 'Dare' in this case. Well, 'Barkis is willin';' but, how about Dolores herself?"

"Do you really mean?" asked Dolores, "that you are willing to go as the doctors recommend?"

"Nothing less," he answered; "to go it blind."

"Literally so in this case, as you have not inquired what climate they have agreed in prescribing."

"Oh! it can't matter much. Banishment is banishment."

"Pray don't look at it in that light, Dare! After all, Western Texas."

"Oh, horrors!"

"Is it worse than you apprehended?"

"My wildest dreams—nightmares, I should say."

"Please don't; you ought to think that it may be hard for me also."

"As if I do not. Then you will really accompany me, Dolly?"

"As if I would permit you to go by yourself."

"I knew that," said the young man, and his voice softened; "consider it settled then."

Dolly Davenant smiled her thanks and withdrew to her own apartment, leaving her brother in the parlor.

Dare was silent for some minutes.

"Is life worth prolonging?" he muttered, at last. "Is it worth having at such a price? The bare idea of this Texas trip is terrible to me for some reason. But I must not die. I must live on Dolly's account; for, when I am gone, she will be alone, and worse—for, after me is James Endicott!"

CHAPTER III.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

DOLORES DAVENANT had heard aright—James Endicott, her distant cousin, and her father's reversionary legatee, had returned home. He had also heard of Adrian Davenant's death. Two days after the funeral, he heard the contents of Adrian Davenant's will.

James Endicott had been abroad for two or three years. So far as the rest of the world knew, there was no reason why he might not have remained in that somewhat indefinite locality in perpetuity. But James Endicott who had never, at any period in his life, called any man his master, had nevertheless felt himself impelled by some irresistible Fate—when, a few days after his arrival he heard of the death and rather singular will of his aged relative, he felt that it must have been his good angel—to return to the land that had given him birth.

It had, in fact, given him all that he possessed; but he had never felt called upon to make it any

return, except, as in the present instance, when he made it the worst return possible, namely, by returning to it himself.

Young Endicott had never been able to boast of any large command of money, but what he had, he had most scrupulously spent upon himself; indeed, he had by no means confined himself strictly to his income, and in consequence had of late been a little embarrassed financially. The embarrassment, however, he it said, affected others more seriously than it did Mr. Endicott.

With this circumstance his conscience reproached him not very bitterly; for it was what he would have termed a very gentlemanly conscience. He was not, however, without his anxieties, and the worst of these, and he well knew it, awaited him on his return to his native land.

And yet he had come.

James Endicott was married. He had been a husband—save the mark!—for the last four years. But this trifling fact was not known or even suspected in the circles in which he revolved, a shining light, in the Old and in the New World.

Truth to say if it was a fault it could scarcely be said to be a fault of his. He would have avoided the mission of anything so serious, had he been able to have done so. But Mrs. James Endicott was a true woman, and James Endicott was young and what we would call in love. So James Endicott was married.

They had not met, this husband and wife, for more than three years; and but for the singular will of the late Adrian Davenant, they would probably never have met until the last great meeting, when both would be weighed in the balances, and when it might safely be wagered James would kick the beam.

The first thought of the young man, on being notified of the clause in the testament of his deceased relative which contingently affected himself, was naturally how it might best and most easily be turned to his advantage.

Dare Davenant was an invalid. That much he knew. The two cousins had met and had no great love for each other. But yet Dare might live for years, and in the mean time—yes, in the mean time, there was Dolly.

This fair young relative of his was beautiful; that he knew? She would have, in the event of marriage, a comfortable income; and in the event of her marriage with him, he would have to all intents and purposes, control of the Davenant estate. Once in that position, he would take care that Dare Davenant did not—but never mind, he would not speculate on that now.

Dolly, he well knew, had been reared in seclusion, and would therefore be without any entanglements or attachments that could interfere with his plans, and then James Endicott believed himself to be irresistible.

But there was his own entanglement in the way.

That, however, could be smoothed quite easily. Rose Endicott had adopted the stage as a profession immediately on taking herself, not from the care, but beyond the annoyance and persecutions of her heartless and unprincipled husband, and naturally would have no desire to interfere with him, as she wished, on her own side, not to be interfered with.

But an interview with Rose must be had sooner or later, and an interview it must be. From the very nature of the propositions he had to make to her, they could not possibly be written.

A man may have no conscience—many men are certainly without that occasionally disagreeable adjunct, and Endicott's conscience, as we have said, was a very gentlemanly and not at all obtrusive one—but, with all that, there are few men who are destitute of common sense, and the greatest wretches on earth are seldom without caution and method in their madness.

Now to put down, in black and white, an offer to one's wife that she may, if she is so disposed, go and marry some one else, provided you are allowed the same liberty, would be a very imprudent thing.

So it was evidently the only thing to be done. James Endicott must call on his wife.

The company with which Rose Endicott was playing was then in Boston, and the address of the popular actress was not difficult to obtain.

So the morning after he arrived at his delectable decision, saw Mr. Endicott at his wife's hotel.

She had not returned from rehearsal. He would wait for her, and wait he did.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, during which the wily and adroit schemer, who had for years been living on his wits and the want of them in others, had ample time to arrange the way in which he must approach the delicate subject before him.

Soon the door opened, and a lady, *petite* and fragile in appearance, but stately and determined-looking withal, entered. Endicott arose.

"Miss St. Evremont," he said.

The lady turned quietly and shut the door behind her. She then advanced to the table in front of the man whom she had once called husband—who was even now her husband in the eyes of the law—and looked him in the face, not

defiantly, but steadily, and as one who felt that she had command of the situation.

"Miss St. Evremont, Rose," he said, "I come here to talk with you seriously, and on a matter that affects us both."

His wife was silent. Her mild, but firm blue eyes still rested unflinchingly on his face.

"Will you not be seated?"

She paid not the slightest attention to this.

"I want to talk with you quietly," he continued, and without heroics. "It is some time since we have met, and it is natural, considering the unfortunate tie between us, that I should have something to propose. If you will listen to me?"

"Go, on!" said the lady, not indifferently, but imperiously. "I will hear you because I must; but be brief."

"I will," he said; "you are not very gracious, but what I have to say will be as brief as I can make it. If it sounds abrupt you will have only yourself to blame."

"I have not forgotten that when we parted it was on the understanding that we should never, at any time trouble one another again. Was not that the compact?"

"It was. And I have kept it. Why do you now break it? Why have you come here?"

"Haughty as ever! I remember your telling me to go my way and you would go yours."

"I did, James Endicott! And I have gone my way—gone it alone. Not one of my early friends have I sought. My own family I have avoided. They believe me dead, as they once believed me to be disgraced."

"It has been a hard and toilsome way, but I have secured the guerdon I sought. I have won independence, and security and peace!"

"Peace?" he said inquiringly, with a slight sneer.

"Yes, peace! Why do you come after these years to disturb it?"

"Not at all; I am far from seeking to disturb you. I shall not attempt to change the even tenor of your way in the least, if you will agree to my proposition."

"I have gone my way too, as you bade me. But I have not been so fortunate as you; with me it has been just the other way—I have lost what I had hoped to win."

If there was a change in the expression of Miss St. Evremont's face at this, it was only one that showed what a matter of supreme indifference it was to her whether James Endicott won or lost in the game of life.

"I am now," he went on, after a pause, "a ruined man—utterly ruined. There is almost literally nothing of my patrimonial estates left me. And in addition to this, I have debts which must be paid in some way—debts of honor."

"Honor?"

The idea seemed to amuse the lady. She actually smiled. He heeded it not but continued:

"There is one way and one only, in which I can pay those debts."

"What have I to do with your debts?"

The contemptuous tone of his wife angered him.

"They might concern you very seriously, madame," he said. "You must be aware that as your husband, I can, if I please, draw every dollar of your salary."

Miss St. Evremont was startled, but not, for worlds would she show him that it was so.

"You forget," she said; "we are separated."

"Not legally," he rejoined. "There was not even a written bond or agreement between us. However, the question may not, and need not, come up. I only mentioned it to show what my creditors might do if they chose and I informed them—" he stopped.

"Go on!"

"I have come to tell you this and say moreover, that there is one way out of the difficulty. It is nothing for you to consent to. Indeed I may say you will be the greatest gainer by it. That, of course, is the only reason I have for thinking that you will consent to it. And yet it is everything to me. Tell me, Rose, is there the least chance of any present or future reconciliation between us—can we ever again be, in more than name man and wife?"

"Never!"

The full but resolute lips were set firm. She evidently meant that negation to the full.

The wrongs and indignities she had endured at the hand of this man were still fresh in her memory. She would never forget them.

"Quite so," he said, "I expected you would say that and I hoped it," he added fervently, hoping thereby to anger his wife, for her scorn and indifference almost maddened him.

It was not that he still cared for Rose; quite the contrary; but like most men he had been vain enough to think that she still regretted him.

"It is mutual, apparently. We regard each other with the profoundest aversion. We did not wish ever to meet again or even hear from each other. Am I not right?"

"For once, yes!"

"Then, Rose" he exclaimed rising to his feet, "let us end it in reality. Our marriage was a secret one. Let our divorce be equally so."

"I give you your liberty from henceforth. You can marry whom you please and when you please. I shall stand in your way no longer."

For a moment Rose St. Evremont seemed to be carried away by his impetuous words and manner. She was on the point of accepting the release he offered her; then, suddenly, the old distrust of all that that he said or did, came back to her. She hesitated.

"This on conditions," she said at length, "that I make you free also. Is it not so?"

"Certainly. You did not look on it as a free gift I hope. I have no gifts to offer you. This is simply a bargain. Do you accept it?"

"If I do—" she began.

"If you do," he interposed, "you will be free to marry as you please. The only witnesses to our ill-starred union are dead, and I was married under an assumed name."

"But suppose I do not wish to marry again?"

"But you will—you know you will—some day!"

"And if I do you also will wed again?"

"I certainly shall. I shall marry a woman with money. That is my one hope now."

"And this lady—do you love her?"

"What has that to do with it? She has money; or, she will have it. The money is what I must have."

"And if I do not accept this proposition of yours, what then?"

"Then all I have to say is that the bond of husband and wife may lead to some disagreeable surprises. I have hinted at only one of them; but that, of itself, ought to suffice."

"I know," she replied, "that there is no act of cruelty or meanness that you would not commit."

"Never mind. If you hate, as I believe you do, Rose; if you never wish to hear from me again, you will agree to this."

"I do, from my very soul," she said, "desire never to see you again. It has been the one great and crowning wretchedness of my life, that I ever fell in your way; and yet I feel, that I ought not to accept your offer."

"It means freedom, Rose."

"For me, yes."

"And for me," he added.

"True. But for her, for this other—no, James Endicott, for her sake, whoever or whatever she may be, I refuse your proposal!"

"You are a fool!" he said, roughly. "You do not know in the least what you are doing—you do not consider. Remember, I was never one to make idle threats."

"Do what you like," she cried. "Do what you can—your very worst! I refuse your offer, now and always. It is no offer; it is not in your power to give me back my freedom. I was indeed a fool not to have seen that from the first. No one can do that, James Endicott! Nothing but death can sever that wretched tie. You have had my answer. Now go!"

"One moment, Rose. You had best not decide thus hastily. You can do as you like, of course. Only don't interfere with me, and I will not with you. But, if you stand between me and my proposed marriage with Miss Dav—But, never mind: you will have a desperate man to deal with, that is all."

"I will promise nothing," declared the lady, in the same quiet and firm tones in which she had first spoken. "Above all things, I long for quiet, and that I may never see or even hear of you again."

"But, for all that, I cannot promise that I will let you go on and commit this crime against another without a word from me. Oh, James Endicott! You whom I first knew as Harry Hatrick, if you could see the miserable, contemptible figure you cut in your present guise, when you try to pass in the world as a gentleman and a man of honor!"

"Go, I say! you are a sneak and a coward, whom had I known I would never admitted to my presence!"

He made no reply, but left his wife's presence; sadder it might be, but no wiser.

Up and down the historic Common he walked, meditating upon his next step. Should it be an advance or a retrograde one?

If the latter, the crisis in his financial affairs was at hand, and he could do nothing but await the consequences. On the other hand he might go on, as he had proposed to himself to do, and let Rose do what she pleased. She could not prove their marriage—of that he was certain; but the publicity would be awkward, to say the least, even though it did not, as it very possibly would, ruin his chances with Miss Davenant.

Then there was the family of Rose, who, in that event, would discover her whereabouts; and, at the same time his identity with that of Harry Hatrick, her reputed deceiver.

The outlook was a gloomy one. But then probably Rose would decide to remain silent. It would certainly be the best thing she could do, as an *expose* would break up that peace which was the one thing she appeared to prize.

Yes, he would go on. Rose would submit, and say nothing. Dolores would, she must become his wife; and once married, he would snap his fingers at the discarded one, and bid her do her worst.

And she, Rose St. Evremont, the but lately

risen star in her chosen profession—now that she had seen the last, as she fervently prayed, of the man who had been the curse of her girlhood, and was destined to be the dark cloud upon her whole life—lost, as the door closed upon him, the spirit that had sustained her while in his presence.

"Who is she? and can I save her?" was the wild cry that escaped her lips, as she looked around the handsomely-furnished room, as if expecting to see the woman against whom this great wrong was meditated arise and confront her.

What she would do in such a case was plain.

What she ought to do now was equally so; but in what way was she, in her ignorance, to set about it?

Sinking upon her knees, she gave utterance to a name that had not passed her lips in years—"Oh, Vivian! come to me!"

CHAPTER IV.

BUTTERNUT BEN.

ONE week after James Endicott's interview with his wife, a party of young men were seated at a table in a well-known gambling-house in New York at play.

There were none of the rolls of bills and piles of gold, popularly supposed to be stacked up on the corners of the table, indicating that the stakes were large; nor was there any very marked sign of exultation or of depression on the face of any who were engaged in the game. In short, nothing very exciting had transpired during the evening, nor was there any sign of a fortune to be made or lost.

It was upon this unusual calm in such a circle that James Endicott entered.

He was evidently no stranger to the parties present, though he had been but a few days in the city. There was an attraction in such society that never failed to draw the degenerate Bostonian, no matter in what part of the civilized or uncivilized world he might be; and he was never quite without the hope that, in his own way, he might yet mend the fortune he had marred.

"All busy here, I see," he remarked, after the first salutation. "No, thanks; I don't care to sit down."

"What! turning virtuous?" inquired one.

"For the time being, at all events," and Endicott laughed. "Fact is, I dropped in to-night merely to say good-by."

"The deuce you say! Back to Boston?" said one.

"Off to Europe again?" suggested a second.

"Neither the one nor the other," was the reply.

"I am going South."

"South indeed! Great Scott!"

"For your health, Endicott?"

"For his reputation," delicately hinted a third.

"Thanks, very much," said Endicott, placidly.

"You're awfully good, you know. But it happens you are all wrong this time. It is simply a business trip—I go in search of my Eldorado."

"This way?" suggested the last speaker, shuffling the cards.

"Not much in that, I'm afraid, for yours truly. At least, the fickle goddess has never been successfully wooed in my case in that way. There is a piece of property in that direction, as it happens, in which I am interested."

"Matrimonially?"

"It may be so, incidentally," returned Endicott.

"And when do you leave, did you say?"

"I did not say; but I leave in the morning."

"By rail?"

"Yes. I thought of going by water, but I've had enough of that lately, and all my sea travels have not yet made a good sailor of me."

Had he said a good anything else, he would have hit the truth for once in his life. As regards the assertion that he made, it was somewhat wide of it, for James Endicott was on the best possible terms with Neptune.

Whether his prospective interest in the hemp crop was such as to preclude the possibility of his being drowned or not, it was quite certain that for him perils by water were but an empty name.

"So you take the railroad, eh?"

"He'll get 'rail-rode' down there—I'll bet ten to one on that—if he's half as tricky as he's been here."

This polite remark came from the individual who appeared to be managing the delectable haunt, which the elegant Mr. Endicott was gracing with his presence.

The latter, however, seemed but little disturbed by it. He replied, somewhat patronizingly:

"Ingratitude, thy name is man! I should like to know how many country fools I've run into this den of yours the past week for you to skin?"

"Do you call this room a den?" demanded the other, in no very gentle tone.

"Precisely. A den full of hyenas! A fellow like you can never be expected to appreciate the patronage of a gentleman."

"You're mistaken," was the reply. "I always do when I see one."

Endicott did not resent this. He merely said, in a grumbling way:

"Serves me right—hang'd if it doesn't. This is the return I get for warning you the other night, when the cops were making a raid on you."

"Yes, you did warn us with a vengeance. You grabbed all the stakes on the table, and was the first man to light out of the shebang. I like that kind of warning. Boys, let's mark him! But no; they'll brand him down South."

Endicott now advanced threateningly.

"I warn you off," said the other; "I am armed."

Then seeing that his belligerent visitor had checked his intention of attacking him, the proprietor turned away, remarking to his customers, indifferently:

"Suppose we continue our game, gentlemen?"

The game was resumed, but James Endicott, notwithstanding this unpleasant little episode, did not withdraw. He turned aside, however, and entered into conversation with two men who had come in during the rather exciting colloquy.

The subject, to all appearance, was an engrossing one; and the men, though scarcely one would judge the kind of pals that would be chosen by a person of Endicott's pretensions, were apparently on intimate and confidential terms with him.

The conversation was carried on in an undertone, and attracted no attention from those who were playing; but it had the effect, nevertheless, of rousing the dormant curiosity of one who, up to this time, had manifested not the slightest interest in anything that had been going on.

He was one who could not fail to attract attention even in a crowd; and the reason that his presence was comparatively unnoticed in this resort, was that he had made it his headquarters for the past three or four days, and all the *habitués* were quite familiar with his appearance.

He had been seated at a table by himself, for some time previous to the entrance of Endicott; and when that gentleman appeared upon the scene, he might have been observed to drop the copy of a popular journal in which he had been interested the early part of the evening, fold his arms before him on the table and let his head drop upon them.

In this position he remained until the consultation began between the three men, to whom allusion has been made. He then arose, with a sleepy air and passed apparently from the room. It was only however to make a short detour, return and quietly and without being noticed by any one take a seat by a screen which divided him from the trio alluded to.

Here he resumed his former attitude.

Had Endicott and his companions taken notice of his presence they would have voted him overcome with liquor and asleep.

But the frontiersman for such he unquestionably was, was very much awake. In fact he was a man whose whole training and habits of life had made it incumbent upon him to be ever on the alert; and few could say that he had been often caught napping. No New York detective was ever more alive to everything around him, that might furnish the slightest clew to past villainy or put him on the trail of crime in contemplation, than was this burly Texan.

He had observed these three men in secret conclave more than once, and a word or two had caught his ear which justified him in keeping both of those organs, and both eyes too upon them.

The denizens of the gambling saloon had heard to-night for the first time of Endicott's projected Southern trip; but it was not the first intimation of the intention of that high-toned citizen to visit his State, that had come to Butternut Ben.

The word "Texas" wherever uttered, had a strange attraction for him, especially in this large city and among strangers; and it was that which had given the key-note to all his recent movements.

That a scheme of some kind and that anything but open and above-board was contemplated by this haughty and supercilious individual, with his meretricious airs of foreign travel, and that these two somewhat seedy and disreputable-looking pards of his were aiding and abetting was very clear to him.

Equally was it clear that Texas was their objective point; and that made it a home question at once for Butternut Ben.

The latter had, on first arriving in New York, adopted as far as was consistent with anything like comfort the costume and customs of civilization and thus was not such a noticeable figure as he would have been had he appeared in the "get-up" of the plains. But, Ben, as has been said, was a scout and borderman in spite of it all.

Even James Endicott had perceived this, and in his accustomed patronizing way had sought to interview him; but the prairie prince was already on his guard. In reply to the first and very natural question, as to where he hailed

from, Butternut Ben had replied Kentucky, and in doing so he had told the simple truth though not the whole truth.

The "dark and bloody ground" was indeed the native State of this "borderer" abroad; and not only so, but he had lived and hunted among its wilds long enough to acquire the *sobriquet* by which he was now altogether addressed and recognized.

But for all this, Ben was a Texan to the heart's core; and the bare mention of the Lone Star State, by the suspicious-looking triad in connection with some evident plan or deep-laid villainy had set him on the lookout for "signs."

"They go on board to-night?" were the first words that he heard spoken.

"About midnight," was Endicott's reply.

"The girl must be allowed to continue her journey?" said the first speaker again.

"By all means; else there would be no sense in my setting out to join her."

"And you leave to-morrow, that is settled, I suppose?"

"To-morrow morning at ten," answered Endicott. "I shall not go direct to San Antonio. There will be no need of that. I can afford to spend some days in New Orleans, and still have abundance of time. This precious Indianola packet may take a month of Sundays in reaching there."

"Why the dickens do people of their means travel in such a way?"

"Recommended for the young man's health, I believe," said Endicott with a sneer.

"Rather healthy he's apt to find it at the start, I take it," suggested one of the men with a laugh, in which Endicott and the other joined.

"You have your disguise both of you?" queried the former after a brief silence.

"To perfection you bet! Both are porters and we expect to make ourselves generally useful."

"Not only that," added Endicott, "but particularly so, in this case. I've made it worth your while, and I won't forget you in the end, if it doesn't miscarry."

"Oh, it won't, no danger of that."

"Not to-night; I fancy, I can rely on you so far. But I referred to the grand finale in Texas. However it is getting late," said Endicott, rising "and I'll see you later."

"We'll be on hand," rejoined the others, as they started for the door.

"And be on time," their employer put in; "see that you do. I shall be there," he continued, following them out, "and will keep an eye on you!"

"Same just here, pards," muttered Butternut Ben, rising as soon as the coast was clear; "I'll be on hand and on time, and drag me to ther boneyard ef I don't keep a eye on all three o' yer!"

CHAPTER V.

A HOUSE MADE DESOLATE.

FOUR years previous to the time at which our story opens in a cool and shady nook, in a pleasant grove of locusts not far from the banks of the classic and beautiful Hudson, a young man reclined upon a mossy bank, lazily puffing into the balmy autumn air the smoke from a fragrant cigar.

He was attired in a hunting-suit of a loud English pattern, stylishly made, and which evidently thus far belied its name, for, although a game-bag and a shotgun lay by his side, it was quite obvious that the youth in question was not a very ardent devotee of the sports of the field.

A few yards in front of the pleasant retreat that he had invaded ran the limpid waters of a clear stream, flowing into the Hudson, and winding through a lovely valley dotted with farm-houses.

To his right and rather nearer the river, in a commanding situation, stood a noble mansion, which, from appearances, must have sheltered at least two or three generations in its time, so different was it in its solid, honest respectability from the mushroom edifices springing up around it.

From time to time, the young man would raise his eyes, and turn them upon the picturesque scene that met his gaze; the silvery stream crossed by the prettiest and most graceful bridges, the rolling hills beyond the home, a dotted vale, nestling away in this quiet corner, as if seeking to hide itself from the rude approach of the iron horse now noisily penetrating the loveliest solitude.

The landscape was half in shadow, half in brightness, as the sun now neared its western home; but it was not its beauties that the eyes of the watcher sought to rest upon. They were restless eyes, even here, where everything spoke of and invited repose; and their glance rested upon nothing that was visible. As he thus raised his head, every feature of his face could be distinctly seen; and distinctly read, too, by any one who was at all skilled in reading human nature.

Very few, thus looking upon him would not at once pronounce him a handsome man; for in his self-satisfied smile and dark, speaking eyes, there dwelt a magnetism—a fascination, that could scarce fail to be dangerous to any young

and susceptible woman who might come under their influence.

He had a perfectly-chiseled face, and a magnificent physique; but, if one sought for the soul beyond that face, disappointment would follow.

Faults of character were visible there, which no true heart and mind would possess. The face was lacking in purity; and young though he was in years, it already bore traces of reckless dissipation.

As the young man raised his eyes for perhaps the twentieth time, his look was rewarded; and yet, it could scarce be said that the expression upon his face at that moment was one of unmixed gratification. But, sooth to say, it might well have been so, for the object that met his gaze was well worth a critical inspection.

A young girl came slowly along the silvan path toward him—a girl with a fairy form, and the guileless face of a child.

She was dressed plainly and inexpensively, yet in perfect taste, and it might have been questioned if a more elaborate costume would enhance her simple, yet perfect beauty. Her clear blue eyes were veiled by long, dark, sweeping lashes, and her delicately-arched brows were shaded in like manner, while round her small and shapely head were coiled masses of pale golden hair, that now gleamed gloriously in the slowly-vanishing sunshine.

The young man sprang to his feet and advanced to meet her.

"You received my note, Rosie?"

"I have, and I am here."

No other words were spoken for some minutes as the youthful pair walked side by side to the little bridge. There they paused, and stood leaning over the rail and looking down into the babbling brook.

Many a time in the three months just past had they stood there; but they were here now together for the last time. Would they, when the interview closed, take their old paths as before—he returning to the enticements of his city home, she to the happy and honored halls that we have described, of which she was the light, and whose quiet had for the first time in years been invaded by him?

Happy for Rosalind Fairfax, should it prove so! But no! Many a time in coming days, when the remembered glow of this autumn sunset was fast fading, would she think with remorse on what might have been—ay, what would have been, had she but known one of the many deceptions that Harry Hatrick had employed to win her to his wishes. Had she even known that the name under which he had wooed her was not his own!

"You wrote me that you must return to Boston, Harry. Is that really so?"

"Really and truly you may depend upon it, else I would not have said it. The time had to come, you know; I have been loitering here beyond my ordinary limits as it is."

The girl seemed to be making great efforts to preserve her calm demeanor unchanged, and, young though she was, she succeeded.

"And you go to-morrow?" she said at length.

"To-night, Rosie."

The tone of regret with which this was spoken, touched the maiden more than aught that he could have said. Her next words were full of reproachful pleading.

"You will return, Harry; surely you will return! You will not leave me?"

"I do not know Rosalind. I fear I may not be able to return another season. But, all the same I have no intention of leaving you."

"What do you mean?"

She looks up in his face with an expression in her eyes like that of a startled fawn.

"I mean just what I say. However all that must rest with you."

"You cannot surely, Harry—" she paused.

"Cannot mean that you are to accompany me, you would say? Yes, Rosie darling, I do mean just that. I should be wretched without you—that goes without saying—and you, I believe you care a little for me."

"Oh, Harry!"

"And you will be my wife?"

"But Harry not now—not so soon!"

"And why not now? There is no time like the present; and by Jove, it is the only time for me so far as I can see—for both of us, for that matter."

"But they all—my father, my aunt—"

"Hate me! I know it."

"No, not that, Harry."

"Well, suspect me then. They have no confidence in me. Complimentary, that; but you, my pet, have every confidence, and that is sufficient."

"And then my brother—"

"Confound him."

A glance at the young man's face, as he said this, would have convinced any one of his sincerity at that moment. The only wonder was that he did not employ a still stronger expression.

"I am sorry, Harry," said the girl, "so sorry, that they all are so unjust; but in time—"

"Just so, when they can't help themselves."

"When they really know you—"

The look on the young man's face was abso-

lutely sinister at this; but the maiden was too much agitated to perceive it.

"What I would say is this, Harry," she went on; "I must remain at home for the present. It will be gloomy, oh, how gloomy, when there is no longer such a thing as meeting with you. But we must both be patient. Some day you will come; and then, when they see how much in earnest we both are, and how faithful you have been—for I know you will be faithful, Harry—they will consent. Don't you think so?"

"I think nothing about it," was the gruff reply. The young man had turned away slightly from his companion, and was gazing down into the water.

Rosalind looked puzzled. Presently he added:

"There will be no such time as you are calculating upon; I mean, I will wait for nothing of the kind; you belong to me Rose Fairfax—you have said it yourself—and I claim you now!"

"Oh, no!" she almost screamed; "not now!"

"And why not, my darling?"

"Harry, I am so young," she pleaded.

"But you grow older—we both of us do, for that matter—every day."

"I know. And so, in the future—"

"But there may be none, you see; in fact, there happens to be none in our case. I can control my destiny at the present moment; to-day that is—before I return to the Hub—but after that, who can answer for anything? Not I for one."

"What do you fear in the future, Harry? What is it that you fear may happen after your return?"

"How can I tell? Everything, something indefinite, the Deluge possibly," and he added in a lower tone: "Hang'd if it isn't the most likely!"

"Tell me what you wish," said the young girl.

"And you will agree to it, whatever it is," he said with a smile. "Now you are talking sense, Rosie."

"I did not say that I would. I cannot promise until I know what it is that you want."

"That is simple enough. I want you."

"I know; but—"

"No buts, if you please, I want you, now!"

There was no response to this, and Harry Hatrick felt that the victory was already his.

"As I said, Rosie, I start this evening for my home, where I must set to work seriously, as a married man should; for I am not going by myself, and I shall have some one henceforth to labor for—there is only one drawback."

"What is that?" she asked.

"Our marriage must for the present be kept secret."

Rosalind was not prepared for this.

The bare idea was painful to her.

"Harry!" she cried out, "why must it be?"

"For many reasons, darling; for more than I have time to tell you now. But any one of them is a good and sufficient one. It is more for your sake than for my own; of that I can assure you," he said, as a last argument.

But, unanswerable though he believed it to be, it was indefinite to meet the case. Young and trusting as Rosalind was, she yet shuddered at the bare thought of what her lover proposed. She had been ready to consent to an immediate marriage; but, it had been under the impression that her friends and his would at once be made acquainted with the true state of things. But this—Oh, no!

"Oh, Harry!" she cried, "I never can."

There was a long silence, but for the girl's sobs.

Most men of the stamp of Harry Hatrick can bear very easily the sight of a woman in tears. She feels all the better for it when it is over, only it seldom leaves her any stronger to resist.

Good men feel sympathy in such cases, for they awaken all that is tender and true and refined in our nature. Sympathy is felt, but not pain; for every one knows that a woman's tears only fall from passing clouds of sorrow, and like summer showers they revive the surroundings.

Men, unlike the weaker sex, give no outward expression to their passing griefs. When storm-clouds of sorrow burst above the proud head of a man, the resistless mind of wretchedness, despite his maddening efforts to resist it, breaks down the only barrier of defense that he can draw about him—his pride and his strength of manhood.

Harry Hatrick, whatever else he might be, was a philosopher in this. He waited patiently, and in the full strength of success until the rain-drops ceased; and he was not doomed to disappointment.

There was a calm after the storm; a pause, a hesitancy on the part of the tempted one, and we are told that they who hesitate are lost. The young man urged his suit no longer. He proceeded on the assumption that the maiden had already consented to a secret marriage. He had not dared propose anything short of this; but to that length he would go sooner than fail.

And to that wretched length his victim went

with him. It would be all right in a year or two at the most—so he assured her—and in the mean time, his love, his presence, his unceasing devotion, would make up for all that she was turning her back upon. She was not too young to love—she had found that out for herself—and therefore she could not be too young to marry. It was sophistry, but it served his purpose.

The pair left the little bridge together, and one hour later Rosalind Fairfax—Fairfax no longer—returned to the paternal roof; but only to leave it, ere the evening had well gone, with a name that was neither hers nor his.

Leaving the home of her petted childhood and idolized girlhood; the loved ones behind being without even the consolation of knowing that she was a wife.

CHAPTER VI.

REPENTING AT LEISURE.

"FAREWELL, then—forever!"

It was no hasty speech, this, and it was no mere angry and excited woman that made it.

Rosalind Hatrick—Rosalind Endicott she knew herself to be—had been but a year a wife, and this was to be the end of it.

The form was still a girlish one, the face had lost but little of its calm loveliness, but it had gained instead an air of determination, which, twelve months ago, would have prevented her from making the shipwreck of her life that she had done.

The man whom she confronted was the same, save a shade or two more of dissipation upon his face, and a more strongly defined heartlessness in the depths of his dark eyes. Men of the Endicott type are not apt to change outwardly in a few years; while conscience sleeps and cares are banished to the tomb of the Capulets, there is nothing that can breed wrinkles and gray hairs.

It had taken time to fully open the eyes of the trusting girl who had sacrificed so much for him; but the awakening had been a gradual one, and the final shock when it came, was not as severe as it otherwise might have been.

Rose Endicott had found out that her idol had feet of clay, but, like many a deceived one before her, she had tried to make the best of it so long as there was any best in the case. She had taken him in haste, though it had been for better and for worse, and the worse grew and increased, day by day, until its superlative degree was reached.

"It is this continued secrecy that I object to, Harry," she still continued to call him Harry as she had done at the first. "I am your wife, lawfully married, and there can no longer be any reason why you should not proclaim me as such."

She had waited patiently before it came to this; but patience had now ceased to be a virtue.

Her husband winced somewhat, but replied quickly:

"It is all true that you say, Rose; and one of these days I will do as you desire, and as I have promised. The time, however, has not come—more's the pity—and you have promised, for your part, to keep our marriage a secret until it has."

"You first insisted," she said, "that your father would be offended at your early and hasty marriage, and that you must prepare him for a knowledge of it by a course of conduct that would win his regard."

"And I told you the truth, Rosalind."

"But now," she continued, not heeding him, "there is no longer that necessity for secrecy. Your father is dead."

"And yours, too."

"Why do you remind me of that?" she exclaimed, still outwardly calm, but none the less agitated; "it seems like charging me with having hastened his end by my disobedience."

"As to that," said her husband, "if there are to be any self-reproaches in the case, I ought to bear my full share of them, the fault being more mine than yours. You see how generous I am. I only alluded to the fact to show that you had no longer the good old gentleman's anxiety to relieve."

"You forget—there is my brother."

"It is he who forgets, I fancy. It is scarcely to be supposed that he troubles himself in regard to you."

"And can you wonder at it?" she demanded. "He thinks, he must think that I have disgraced him."

"That is unfortunate," said Endicott; "but the young man has himself to blame. Had your father and he given me credit for the honorable intentions that I had, there would have been no need for any clandestine step. They might have known that you were my wife and welcome; provided they kept the fact a secret from the others. It was my own father that I feared."

"And now that he is dead what more is there to fear? You are your own master."

"Am I?" he said, sarcastically.

His wife paid no attention to this but continued her grievances, in the same mild, but determined way.

"Your father, so you have told me, had every regard for you, every confidence in you, at the last—why were you not honest with him then? Why did you not tell him of your marriage?"

"Probably I forgot it," he said, carelessly.

Rosalind was equal even to this.

"It has ceased to be a matter of much importance I admit," she began.

"If you take that view of it—"

"And I know that you do," she interrupted him.

"Then," he said, "we are agreed so far."

"There is such a thing," said his wife, "as agreeing to disagree. So, at least, I have heard. But it happens that I have no taste for such a life. Union, when it is no more than that, is worse than the bitterest, the most irreconcilable disunion. I would prefer being chained to a dead body."

"You are complimentary," he sneered.

"I do not seek to be, Harry; only truthful."

"What, then, is it that you desire?"

"What I have, for some time, asked and pleaded for, you well know. I now demand it!"

"And that is?"

"That you acknowledge me as your wife."

"Rose," he said, "I have but just told you that it is, at the present time, impossible. At some future—"

"Harry," she cried, "do you remember your telling me, but a twelve-month ago, that there was no future in our case? I listened to you then. You must hear me now. There can be no future time for this."

"As you please about that," he replied sulkily.

"Why should this be kept up longer? You have ceased to care for me."

"I have never said so, Rosalind."

"Well, assume a virtue if you have it not;—say so now!"

"I could not say it truthfully, Rosie. I have never ceased to love you."

And strangely enough the man spoke the truth. The charm that at first had drawn James Endicott, still held him. Base and unprincipled he was, selfish in everything he might be but vacillating, never. His heart, such as it was, still belonged to the pretty and graceful woman before him.

"I am sorry," she said; and her eyes looked the sorrow which she spoke.

"For what?" he asked. "Because I love you?"

"Yes!"

It was galling to the man's pride, for he saw that she no longer cared for him.

When Rosalind Fairfax had first become his wife her vanity—for what woman is without it—had been gratified by the devotion which her handsome, fascinating husband bestowed upon her; and, in spite of the many regrets that would arise for all that she had relinquished, she believed that she was happy.

But the awakening, though, as we have said, it had been somewhat slow and gradual, was not long in coming. When it did come, as is always the case when one discovers the truth, the poor girl wondered how she could have deceived herself.

While his father lived, James Endicott cared more for his own interests, than for anything else in the world, except his own gratification. His worldly wisdom, at that time, was proof against everything except his own passions. Later on these passions—and their name was legion—were to gain the full mastery.

Fascinating in society, popular among his own sex, and without pity or scruple where the other sex was concerned; probably the nearest approach to a pure and ennobling sentiment that ever in the least controlled him was his passion for the pretty Rosalind Fairfax.

He set out in life with the boast of so many of the champion and carpet heroes of his generation, that he was one who never broke his word to a man, or kept it to a woman. He was to end, as all such moralists must do, sooner or later, in having the reputation of keeping it to no one.

The selfish passion with which his young wife's grace, and beauty, and purity had inspired him, was to last, however, long after it had filled her with loathing.

"You are not very gracious," he now said to her.

"Ask yourself, James Endicott, if I have reason to be."

"I confess I do not quite understand this," he replied, as if determined to remonstrate. "You have a right to complain I admit; but it hasn't always been a bed of roses for me either. I have not enjoyed this abnormal state of things any more than you have."

"Why not end it, then?"

He saw his wife's meaning, but he would still pretend to misunderstand her.

"My dear Rose, I have told you it impossible—I mean, just at this time."

"Nevertheless, I intend to do it."

"What?" he exclaimed. "To make our marriage public—to claim me as your husband?"

"As to proclaiming our marriage, I care nothing one way or the other. But claim you as my husband, James Endicott, I never will!" cried Rosalind, in a voice full of bitterest contempt.

He was startled, almost paralyzed by this unexpected announcement from his patient and long-suffering wife; but he soon recovered himself.

Forcing a smile, he went up to her and extended his hand. She drew up her slight form until it was almost majestic. Endicott laughed, a quiet, forced laugh, which still had something sinister about it.

"By Jove! you look quite the tragedy queen, my little Rosalind, and a very pretty one, too. But we have had quite enough of this sort of thing, don't you think? It is a new phase of our wedded experience, and just by way of variety, may do for a change, but carried too far, it becomes rather a bore."

"I quite agree with you," was her answer.

"Then a truce to all this."

"There can be none. It would be only crying, 'Peace, peace, when there is no peace!'"

"But there is no reason why there should not be peace; and, if it goes to that, I intend to have peace where I live."

"I trust that you may," she said, still unmoved.

"I have made up my mind," Endicott continued, "to start for Europe in a week or two."

The face of his wife actually brightened. It would be better so in every way. Their different paths in life henceforth would diverge from the start.

He saw the change in her expression, and, as usual, misinterpreted it.

"You will like it, Rosalind?"

"I am not going," she replied quietly, as before.

"What do you mean? You refuse to accompany your husband?"

"Are you my husband?"

"What nonsense! You know that I am."

"Then assert your marital rights, sir! You must do it before I go with you. Mind, I do not ask you to do it. I do not wish to accompany you. It is in that alone that you can compel me."

Endicott's eyes flashed with rage, but he controlled himself. In a moment he was at her side, the smile, which he could assume at pleasure, upon his face, and his arm around her.

She felt his touch for the first time since she had known him, with a sickening loathing that almost overcame her. He saw this, and it almost maddened him, but he still restrained himself.

"Don't be a fool," he said, with a jocose tenderness, that was to her little short of horrible.

"We have had enough, for the present, of heroics. If you are permitted to indulge in them much longer, you will be treating me to hysterics. It is high time to come down to common sense."

Rosalind said nothing, but withdrew some paces from her husband. She had maintained her composure throughout. The "heroics," thus far, had been on the other side. Not even yet understanding his wife, Endicott returned to the charge.

"You understand our position, Rose, and how impossible it is that I can arrange everything as you—as both of us—could wish. It has been a trifle monotonous for you here, I can well believe, situated as we have been, but in Europe—"

"I am not going," she repeated.

The persistence almost infuriated him. It was not that he did not feel sanguine of still bending the wife whom, in his selfish way, he loved, to his wishes, as in the past; but he was not equal to being thus crossed in his purposes. It was a new experience to him: a decidedly new one from little Rose.

James Endicott was by no means an effeminate man by nature; but, in the rather rapid process of destroying his constitution, he had developed "nerves," and the least thing unstrung him.

But for his solicitude for keeping up a reputation for good manners; or, in other words, for a certain superfine calm in society, he would have become a prey to irascibility.

"Where, then, are you going, may I ask?" he said.

"Once away from you, and no longer claiming you as a husband, it cannot, I fancy, much matter to you. To answer your question, however, I have not yet decided."

"I should suppose not," he said, with his most sinister look and manner.

"But none the less," she went on, "I have decided to go; to leave this house and to leave you."

"And when, may I inquire?"

"I go to-day, Mr. Endicott."

"Indeed," he rejoined. "There is no time like the present. You evidently do not believe in procrastination. As one, however, who has still some little right to advise you, I would suggest that you be not hasty."

"There is no danger, sir. I have learned my lesson in that respect."

"It is farewell, then?"

"Yes, James Endicott, and forever."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ONLY DAUGHTER OF HER RACE.

A YEAR out of one's life! Just one little year! What a poor little atom of time it seems—a mere drop in that ocean of the full three-score and ten which a wise man has put down as the allotted period.

And yet how much one little year may bring forth. How fruitful it may be in hopes and fears, in sorrows and rejoicings. It has its seed-time always, full of trust and happy expectation; its summer when the young watch for the opening of the bloom, the reddening of the fruit, the ripening of the grain; its autumn, in which we all gather in the harvest we have sown—a harvest of wheat, it may be, or of tares, of wholesome fruits or Dead Sea apples; a winter, cold without, but with warm and loving faces within, or else void, and sere and bare.

Only one little year? It is powerful for good, or for evil; to make or to mar. It may slip by with us, in happy ease unnoticed, or waste away in weary toil, day after day, leaving no trace when it is gone.

Such a year had Vivian Fairfax known, unlike every other that had gone to make up his life.

He had lived, surrounded by its joy and sorrow, its passion and pain; but they had been the work of others, though they filled up those gloomy moons for him. His own life had been colorless enough.

Vivian Fairfax was alone now. His father was dead. He had survived the flight, and, as he believed, the disgrace of his child but a few months.

That child, Rosalind, "sole daughter of his house and heart," we have seen taking her first fatal step as the legal wife of the man who had won her as Harry Hatrick. We have also witnessed her parting, whether for good or for evil, from the same man, whom she and we know as James Endicott.

But of her whereabouts since the eve of her flight from that quiet home on the Hudson, none there knew.

The marked attention of the handsome young idler, Harry Hatrick, to the pretty daughter of Old Squire Fairfax had been noted by every one; noted particularly by the squire and his son and disapproved.

Something there was with all young Hatrick's charm of manner and conversation, which to their experienced ears had not the true ring in it; and love for little Rosie, the one daughter and sister, made them jealous.

Hatrick saw this and sought not to disarm their suspicions. Rather he wrought cunningly upon the sympathies of the young girl, already more than half in love, or fancying herself so—which is about as bad while it lasts—by posing in the character of a martyr for her sake; one who was misunderstood, and misrepresented. Such tactics seldom fail to win.

When the climax came, and Rosalind was found to have fled, no doubt was on the mind of any one who had been cognizant of the growing intimacy between Hatrick and the young girl—least of all, on the minds of her father and brother—that he was the companion of her flight.

Of their marriage all remained in ignorance; for, when the first inquiries in regard to such a preliminary failed to elicit any proof of such a ceremony having been performed, the matter was dropped, even by those most interested in proving that it had taken place.

In point of fact the one who officiated on the occasion though fully qualified, had been tarrying in the neighborhood but for a day or two. This had been well known to the would-be bridegroom who took full advantage of the circumstance; finding also, that his clerical friend was to leave about the same time with himself.

The only witnesses were the servant of Endicott and the Bohemian parson; and as they also left the scene, that was easily disposed of. Thus all traces of the one mitigating act on the part of the misguided girl were lost.

From that day until the one which saw the close of Squire Fairfax's life, the name of his daughter was not mentioned by him. But he of did speak it, at the last.

"Vivian," said the dying man, as he held the hand of his son, "you will not forget your sister."

"I have never forgotten her, father," said the young man.

"What I mean is," he repeated, "that you must not forget, whatever may happen in the future, and if you should see or hear from her again, that poor Rosalind is your sister, your only sister—poor little Rosie."

"There may be much," said Vivian Fairfax, "many things which we do not know, that might be said in her behalf. We don't know everything, father."

"I have been thinking so of late," was the reply of the old man; and so he died.

At least there would be that comfort for Rose Endicott, when she should know that, even with the fear of the worst present with him, her father had forgiven her.

It was now winter, and for days together, Vivian Fairfax wandered listlessly around the now desolate home of his race. It was not that it had any pleasant attraction for him now. Far from it. He did not, by any means, like the look of his surroundings; and few could blame him for it.

The cold and darkness of the long gloomy evenings through which he paced the grounds

like a sentry, would have been enough without any more painful associations.

The fine old mansion, in its stern old-fashioned simplicity looked gray, and chill and ugly in the winter dusk; its ghostly snow-wreaths draping roof and window-ledge, and the glassy icicles glistening from sill and coping.

There was something in the look of the broad, black frontage that spoke of hiding and mystery. So, at least it seemed to the lonely lord of the manor, in his present morbid state, as he viewed it on every side. Every one, he fancied, without knowing aught of the domestic skeleton, would feel at once that there was a secret hidden behind the cold impassive mask.

Vivian Fairfax had not been idle in the months that had elapsed since his sister's flight. The fugitives had been traced to Albany, and thence to Springfield; thence presumably they had gone to Boston, but there nothing could be ascertained. Harry Hatrick was unknown. He had taken the name for the summer, and laid it down on his return to the modern Athens.

But Vivian was in no mood to continue his search; feeling, as he did, that it might be the truest kindness to Rosalind to give her the benefit of every doubt that might be in her favor, and not to seek to draw the curtain from what in mercy had best not be revealed.

But, in his loneliness and bereavement better and more human thoughts came to him; thoughts of the early days when little Rose was his pet, of later ones when she was his pride, and of the hopes that had clustered about her, ere the tempter came. With these too, came stronger, more vengeful thoughts of the author of this grief and misery.

Rosalind, his beautiful, his once innocent sister, might even now be deserted, and in wretchedness, and he, her betrayer—But the bare idea was madness.

His mind was made up. He would find the lost one. He would forgive and welcome her back to the old home, whose light she had been; and then, let this man Hatrick beware. A brother's vengeance would be found no slight thing, let a false state of society view the man's crime as they would.

"I cannot," he said to himself, "undo for her the past; I cannot give back to her the happy, peaceful girlhood that she has lost, but I can and I will take her from the misery and the despair that must make up the future for her."

With this resolution young Fairfax set out for Boston, with the firm conviction that the man whom he sought was there in hiding, and fully resolved that he would hunt him down and force from him the whereabouts of his sister, and an acknowledgment of the wrong he had done her.

Leaving his home upon which these two dark clouds had lowered, the young man took up his abode in the grand old historic city of Boston, and waited patiently, feeling confident that, some day, he would come face to face with Harry Hatrick.

"It was now spring-time, and his patient waiting for long weeks seemed no nearer being rewarded than on the first day of his stay. Thoughts of home and home duties had begun to come to him, and he had about decided, although averse beyond anything to giving more publicity to his affairs than was absolutely necessary, to place a detective upon the track; furnishing with a description of the man he was in search of, the only clew in his possession.

With this in his mind, he was riding up Beacon Hill, in company with a friend, when, casting his eyes to the right across the Common, he saw near the edge of the inclosure, a form that was strikingly familiar. Hastily alighting, and with a brief apology to his friend, he entered the Park and walked up to him. As he came nearer the suspicion in his mind became absolute certainty.

Right or wrong the man he approached met his gaze unflinchingly. Whether the recognition was mutual or not, could never be decided from the manner of the individual accosted.

Without hesitating a moment Vivian said: "Mr. Hatrick, I believe—Mr. Harry Hatrick!"

The gentleman smiled blandly, with a polite disclaimer.

"You mistake, sir. My name is not Hatrick."

"You tell me your name is not Hatrick," he exclaimed in some excitement. "Do you not know me? Do you not remember me?"

"Really," said the other, "I am unable to recall where I had the honor of meeting you."

"My name is Fairfax."

"Most happy to make your acquaintance," said the other; "and mine is Endicott—James Endicott." He took out his card and handed it to his excited interviewer.

The latter took the pasteboard, glanced at it, and read:

"MR. JAMES M. ENDICOTT,
Arlington St., Boston."

He quietly returned it, but without a word of apology. On the contrary, he continued his catechizing.

"And you say you never saw me before?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Fairfax, to my knowledge."

Vivian Fairfax was puzzled, and he looked it, but he was not yet convinced. However, he accosted the gentleman, this time in milder tones.

"Permit me," he said, "to put another question: are you married?"

A slight hesitancy was manifested on Mr. Endicott's part at this, but he replied, calmly: "I am."

At this moment, and before Vivian could think what he ought next to say, a young gentleman, almost a counterpart of Endicott, as far as dress and deportment went, passed them, saluting the latter.

"Say, Frisbee," said the Bostonian: "just a moment, please. I want you to satisfy this gentleman as to my identity. And first, you know my name?"

"Certainly, Endicott," said the other, with a smile; "Jim Endicott, no less."

"And no aliases?"

"None that I ever heard of."

"Anything more, sir?" said Endicott, turning to the now nonplused Fairfax.

"Nothing, but—stay—" he now accosted the stranger, "can you tell me where Mr. Endicott spent the last summer?"

A glance passed between the young men, but Vivian failed to catch it on the fly.

"None better," was the answer. "With me in Norway."

Disappointed and annoyed, Fairfax turned away.

There was nothing more that he could say or do. To be sure, he might keep an eye on the movements of the man who so much resembled Hatrick, but the idea did not then occur to him.

"Drunk or crazy," the latter said, as he moved off.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GRASS WIDOWER FOR TEXAS.

WHEN James Endicott left the presence of the actress who was known as Rose St. Evremont, it was with the firm determination that, let her do what she might, he would seek the society of these relatives of his, to whom he was but slightly, and he had reason to fear not very favorably known, and use all diligence to make the Davenant estate his own beyond peradventure.

He came, he saw, and he—was conquered.

Endicott, the heartless, the selfish, self-contained man of the world, became at once a conquest of the unconscious fascination of Dolly Davenant. The heart such as it was, which had remained, in its way, for three years, faithful to the wife he had wronged, was now filled with a new image.

The property, he decided, from the first view he had of his kinsman, would be his in any event, and that before long; but even to him in his present impecunious condition the boarded wealth of old Adrian Davenant would have been a bit of gilded mockery, if the daughter of the house of Davenant went not with it.

"I thought of pretending to be in love with her," he said to himself; "but there can be no pretense about it now."

He would succeed—he vowed that he would; when had he ever failed in anything that he had set his heart upon?

But confident though he was, he grew sullen and moody when feeling what he had forgotten more than once lately, that he was already a husband; that he had been one for years, and had not been successful in the profession.

He had fully expected to hear from Rose; to find that she submitted, that she willed that he should go his way in silence. But Miss St. Evremont made no sign. He felt that he had been decidedly ill-used.

A couple of weeks had passed in this way, on nearly every day of which James Endicott, feeling himself privileged as a relative, had danced attendance on the Davenants. Through it all his self-conceit led him to believe that he was making rapid advances; but an accident was to show him that the brother and sister had not deemed it worth their while, perhaps rather had judged it best that he should be allowed to remain in ignorance, to acquaint him with their plans for the winter.

It had chanced that once or twice, in a certain resort which the not over-fastidious young man was not above visiting when his exchequer needed replenishing, he had noticed an individual of a pronounced nautical cut, who seemed to be a "looker on in Venice." We may judge of his surprise, then, at seeing the same seafaring party coming out of the Davenants' one morning when he himself was on his way thither.

"I wonder," said Endicott, "who and what that sailor-looking fellow is, and what he can be doing there? I'll interview the fellow and find out. I'd best pretend, I fancy that I remember him; which by the way I do. Here he comes!"

"Hello, Old Salt!" How are you?"

"Aho! there, Fresh-water Eel! How is it that you are out of the Card Castle?"

"Why not? You don't suppose I spend my entire waking existence at the card-table, do you?"

"Blowed if I didn't b'lieve ye put in the

sleepin' part of it in thar, and spent the wakin' part in yer hammock!"

"Not by a large majority. But, I say, what are you peddling? I saw you come out of the house of a lady friend of mine just now."

"Peddling? Wal, I'm blessed and blow'd! D'ye take me, Bill Barnacle, the captain of the North Star, Texas packet, for a darned peddler?"

"Beg your pardon, captain," said Endicott, in his most polite and highly polished manner. "I was only joking. Of course I knew you were a sailor all along by the cut of your jib. Got any passengers this trip?"

"Yes: right smart. Young lady back thar, and her brother, ruther blue about the gills, the young sculpin is, takin' the trip for the benefit of their healths. Reckon hern is all right, though; his'n I should say—"

"Just so. They are not the parties I was thinking of. Smith, you said, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't. Name ain't spelled nothin' like it. Davenport or Dammack, or something o' that color."

"Ah! don't know them. Well, I wish you a good voyage, I'm sure. When do you sail?"

"Tuesday, 'bout daybreak. Passengers coming on board Monday night. Like to take the voyage?"

"Not this trip, thank you, captain. By the way, where did you say the North Pole lay?"

"No'th Star, you lubber! Foot of Fulton street. Like to go on board?"

"Not any. Can imagine very easily what the Polar Star is like. These packets seem to have been run up by machinery. Deuced little difference in them."

"Purty much like a certain class of humans one runs foul of right often, 'specially hyer in York. 'Bout the same build and rig, built for short an' ca'm v'yages, and good fer—not the fu'st darned thing!"

"By Jove! funny, this morning, ain't you? Must have seen something to sharpen your wits as you came up town. Met some of the bulls and bears in Wall street, perhaps?"

"No; but I run against a cross 'twixt a calf an' a cub sence I struck the avenoo. So-long!"

"Quite so," said Endicott, superciliously. "See you later."

"Reckon not," growled Captain Barnacle, as he swung off. "I don't run on your tack."

"I made a point there," soliloquized Endicott, as he resumed his walk. "Going off without so much as giving me a hint of their intentions. That looks anything but promising. It is quite evident that some other tactics than the peaceable ones I had decided on must be resorted to. No, I won't look in on Miss Dolly this time, for I must sit down somewhere and mature my plans."

The gentlemanly vagabond had been singularly prosperous of late. He had in fact begun to think that luck had turned with him. And once started, luck seemed to follow luck, just as misfortunes so often crowd upon each other. With the first turn of the tide in his favor his creditors, who had been veritable Shylocks up to this time, changed their front and showed an amount of confidence that was positively exhilarating.

He began to feel that he could go almost any length.

Men who held his promissory notes ceased to look anxious. Those who knew of the Davenant will, and took the gloomiest view of Dare Davenant's health, were ready to advance him money on his prospective inheritance, and they began to consider prayerfully the amount of interest they ought to exact under the circumstances.

In addition to all this, he had been uniformly successful at the gaming-table for several nights past.

Little wonder was it then that James Endicott, a fatalist, as gamblers ever are, began to consider the pretty and graceful Dolores the cause of his good fortune; and, from that circumstance, to think of her as a most praiseworthy young lady and quite deserving of highest admiration.

For the last few days, therefore, he had employed himself in trying to make her believe him worthy of her confidence. Then love would, as a matter of course, speedily follow. At all events, it would come in time.

Only the day before Endicott had begun to flatter himself that Dolly looked upon him with no little favor. There was certainly less of the rather chilling reserve that had been noticeable on former occasions. Even Dare manifested none of the distant hauteur which had previously characterized his manners toward his cousin and her apparent, and treated him with quite the freedom of an old friend.

But this intelligence coming thus to him so unexpectedly from the skipper of the North Star, was decidedly a damper. This want of restraint in his presence, that had so cheered and encouraged him, was owing it now appeared to their feeling of relief at the prospect of being relieved of the necessity of seeing him.

Going and not once intimating their intention, made Endicott furious.

He was in his own apartment now, and he must think this over. Clearly, if they went on

this Southern trip, he must go also. It would never do to think of accompanying them. Even to pretend to be accidentally their fellow-passenger, would be quite too "transparent," as he termed it. A girl like Dolores Davenant could not fail to see through anything so transparent. All the same he must go.

He would contrive, in some way, to come up with them there. Texas would be a good field for his operations, and it would probably come about that he might, when there, prove himself of such service to this, his new-found divinity, as to win her lasting regard.

It was the land of adventure, par excellence—so he had always heard—and his next move should be in that direction.

Scarcely had Endicott decided on this step, when he was waited upon by a brace of worthies, whose intimacy with a man of his pretensions could only be accounted for in one way. They were men who might be very useful in certain ways; provided only that those ways were dark; and the devious way, in which James Endicott had been traveling of late, was not always well lighted. This unsolicited visit from them, was, therefore, anything but unwelcome to him.

"Glad to see you, boys," he said. "Sit down. Try some of that brandy. It isn't bad."

"Reckon not, boss," was the reply; "or we wouldn't ketch you samplin' of it."

Endicott smiled. A compliment even of this kind, was always acceptable. He had work for these men to do, and it would be necessary for him to take them to some extent, into his confidence.

But the exact work that he intended did not come into his mind, until the instruments he would make use of to effect it were there, seated in his presence.

With them came the tempter and the temptation.

To do Endicott, rascal though he was, justice, he was by this time madly in love. He had fancied himself the same, when dainty Little Rose Fairfax was the subject of his passion, and he had acted meanly and selfishly though not in a legal sense criminally to obtain her. But he was little more than a boy then; or so, at least he viewed it, and the wonder was that the silken cord had held him even for the brief time that it did. How different this was!

He had been fond of Rosalind—almost too passionately fond at the first for her somewhat staid liking—but he had been unaccustomed to having his will thwarted in anything, least of all in what he considered trifles, but on which so much of a woman's happiness rests.

With all this, he had never been able to understand her; and this troubled him not a little when he fancied that he loved her the most. Her nature was an enigma to him. Her mind was a puzzle which would not be pieced together with the rectangular correctness of conventional life. A child in heart she was, when he first met her, and as a child he had won her.

He had acted meanly, and as a fraud, in deluding her into a secret marriage with him; but, when she was all his own, he was no nearer understanding the depths of her heart and mind than before.

For all that she was his; and the ideas of undisputed possession to such men is the highest happiness they can expect to reach. If he had not sounded the depths of her being, at least no one else had.

She was gone now, however; gone from him of her own free will and not of his. But she might go now. The only wish with which he troubled himself in regard to Rose, was that she might never again cross his path.

He had asked this of her, begged for it, when the Davenant fortune was the only assurance that he sought to make doubly sure by a marriage with Dolly; but now that the latter was the one object that made life worth having he would demand it.

Nothing, not even Rose herself should stand in the way of his making Dolores Davenant his wife.

"Strange," he said, to himself; "and to think that I should have stumbled upon my fate thus, as it were by accident. To think that, after I have seen and known, after my first and so nearly fatal entanglement, my one bright particular star should thus rise and shine upon me!"

"The idea of that insane will of that idiotic old egotist!—but, by Jove! he had some method in his madness after all—should have thus brought her to my notice and placed her within my reach!"

"How she impressed me at the first! That look in her eyes which I have never before seen in any one, proud, haughty and yet charmingly steadfast and with a depth of undeveloped love and constancy that a world were well lost for."

It did not take long for Endicott to arrange his plans for the Monday night following, with the willing tools who appeared so ready before he had felt that he should require them; who were paid now liberally in advance, and who, should their work prove a success, were to be further, and more richly rewarded.

"I wonder how the peerless Dolores will receive me, when we meet under the tropic sky, not long hence?" he thought when the pair of

worthies had taken their leave. "I must get up a romantic interview of some kind and play the sympathizing relative in the most approved style. I fancy it will tax even my ingenuity to do it, but it must be done; and done, too, in a way that will make the queenly beauty take to me at once."

For the scheme having been thus hastily matured, was to be followed by James Endicott's starting at once by rail for New Orleans en route for the Lone Star State.

The Davenants had made their arrangements without condescending to acquaint him with them, and he would now return the compliment.

Then when he and Dolly should meet, how plausible would be his impassioned tale that he had sought her out, as her kinsman and friend, feeling that she was exposed to dangers, from which he must protect her, at every loss and every hazard.

For they had decided—he and his tools—that Dolly Davenant should go on the North Star—but Dare—Ah! therein was the plot!

CHAPTER IX.

"SHE SAILED AWAY AT BREAK OF DAY."

THE entire island of fair Manhattan had been enveloped in fog during the whole of that Monday, and when evening came a chilling wintry rain was washing the streets. The darkness, as it drew near midnight, was such that it might almost be felt; and this was the time which Dare Davenant and his sister had fixed upon to go on board the Texas packet.

An hour earlier a man, who had been dining to his satisfaction at a fashionable up-town restaurant, and who had employed the time since then in writing some notes and destroying others, stood under the portico of the Brunswick, looking up Fifth avenue.

The lamp which shone full upon him showed him to be a young man of perhaps five-and-twenty, rather pale, with classically-molded features and dark hair and mustache. He wore a slouch hat, and was enveloped from head to foot in a gossamer waterproof.

After a nervous and dissatisfied glance around him, he raised his umbrella and set off over the wet pavement for a dozen blocks or more. He then turned to the west for a hundred yards or so, and paused before a monotonous line of brown-stone fronts, while his eyes became fixed upon one directly opposite to him, and where no light gleamed except from a single burner in the hall.

"Not gone yet," he whispered; "of course not—but I must make sure that they are really going."

The patient watching of the man was soon to be rewarded.

A carriage drove up to the curbstone. A servant came out on the stoop, and the listener heard distinctly the words:

"In about ten minutes."

Instantly the man started toward Broadway. Here, getting into a coupe, he was driven off rapidly down-town.

Within the house, the last preparations were being made for the journey.

A young lady, already in a traveling-dress made up largely of velvet and sealskin, was closing a sachel in which she had just put away a few indispensable toilet articles that had been left to the last.

This done, she seated herself in an easy-chair, and a look of care and anxiety was now seen to be plainly marked on a face of imperial beauty.

"I have prayed for this, I have urged it in every way; and now that it has come, I dread it."

"And yet, it must be for the best. Dare himself sees that, and he has been so very much brighter and stronger since we began our preparations for it. Literally, too, I have been looking forward to going with pleasure on my own account. I cannot tell why I should, but I do dread each meeting with James Endicott. I have felt it from the first, on my brother's account, but lately I have had a strong personal aversion to, and fear of him."

"Dare has always distrusted him—he knew him as a boy—and I cannot put from me the thought, wicked though I know it is, that he is the one person in the world who is to be benefited by Dare's death."

"The idea is too shocking, but if James Endicott is the unprincipled man he is believed to be, and if he has already squandered his own patrimony, the temptation in his case is indeed a strong one. And I feel somehow, I know, that he is not the man who will even try to resist it."

"Yes, it is best for us both, aside from the benefit that it will be, we are assured, to my poor brother's health, that we go at once. But now, on the very eve of our departure I shrink from it with a presentiment of, I know not what!"

As the maiden ended her musing aloud there came a tap at the door.

"May I come in, Dolly?"

"To be sure."

She turned and faced the young man who entered. The instant that she heard the voice the

whole expression of her face changed. She greeted the new-comer with a smile that was sunshine itself.

He was slight in form, delicate and studious in appearance, and his boyish face and manner gave little indication of the twenty-two summers and as many winters that he had lived. He gave one, however, the impression rather of a youth who stood more in need of air, exercise, and an object in life, than of any thought in the whole scope of *materia medica*.

He, too, was dressed for a journey, and carried an extra wrapping over one arm.

"Ready, Dare?" inquired his sister.

"Always on time, you know," he said with a laugh.

"You are looking wonderfully well," she added after a slight pause. "I had feared that the work of packing, which you would insist upon doing would fatigue you."

"Fatigue me indeed! You have no idea, sis, the amount of hard work I am equal to in an emergency. I tell you, I only need some stimulus like this to develop my physical resources."

"But you mustn't overdo it, Dare."

"I'm not much given to that sort of thing," he rejoined. "And I can just tell you I feel so well and strong after this break in the monotony of my existence, that I have arrived at the conclusion that this Texas trip of ours is like to be neither more nor less than a fool's errand."

"What do you mean?" demanded Dolly a little alarmed.

"Only that I don't need it for my lungs or stomach's sake; and I don't think that even you will contend that there is much pleasure in it."

"But I do want to go, Dare."

"Certainly. And because you do, I fancy is the most intelligible reason you could give for it. But, never mind; as it happens, so do I!"

"You really think you ought to go, Dare?"

"I do, Dolly; because you wish it."

"Good boy!" exclaimed his sister.

The look that she gave him would have been an ample reward for earth's greatest conqueror, had it fallen upon him; but Dare Davenant was only her brother, and its sweetness was wasted.

Not for worlds would Dolores Davenant have hinted to him the nameless presentiment of some coming evil that haunted her. This one being whom she loved on earth must be removed from the power and influence of the evil, whatever it might be. His health might not require the journey—she prayed that he might be right in this, and the doctors wrong—but none the less did the feeling force itself upon her, that they must be up and away.

The time had come, and they were going; yet Dolores trembled. The Ides of March had come, but not gone.

Dare Davenant had been a spoiled son and brother, but never a vicious one. Not even in the strictest sense of the word, had he been a selfish one; but the treatment he had received from his childhood had been such as to bring out all that was selfish in it while the many strong and manly traits which were his by nature, had thus been suffered to be dormant.

If his sister wanted him to read when he wanted to walk, he would good-humoredly, put aside her book with an assumption that a walk with him must be the most enjoyable thing in the world.

If she wanted to walk or drive, when he preferred to rest, he would laughingly set up his laziness as an all-sufficient plea for remaining within doors.

He never took any pains to conceal his weariness when she read her favorite books to him. If he happened to feel sleepy when she sung or played, he slept without even a thought of making an apology for it.

With all this, he would not have knowingly offended her or indeed any one. Had anybody told Dare Davenant that he was selfish, he would have been astonished.

He was simply a hot-house plant, nurtured in a kindly but artificial atmosphere, and now to be exposed to the chill out-door air; to brave the winds of winter and the touch of rude hands—a treatment which must have one of two effects, either to kill or strengthen.

At the dock lay the North Star, a Texas packet, heavy and struggling in the darkness, as the black waves dashed against the pier.

There were quite a number of passengers, for many had become enamored with the ocean trip; and not a few, like Dare Davenant, had been recommended to make the voyage in that way, instead of by rail.

But it looked like a gloomy prospect to-night; for, to all appearance, the elements had conspired to work destruction with the noblest crafts that man could send out to battle with the cruel waves, and to bring their precious freight of human souls safely into port.

A few of such now sat shivering and trembling in the pent-up saloon, sick of the heaving and pitching of the vessel, that seemed impatient to cut away from her moorings and ride the breakers far out beyond Sandy Hook.

Porters were busy with the baggage, and stalwart seamen were handling the last installment of freight.

The man whom we have seen at his watch in front of the mansion on Murray Hill alighted

from his *coupe*, and, dismissing the driver, now took up his position under a wretched awning which, in a measure, protected him from the dripping rain.

His eyes were fixed on the out-going packet, but it was evident he did not expect to be a passenger.

The bluff but genial Captain Bill Barnacle was on duty shouting out his commands. Every one, apparently, had left the vessel except those who were going and the little army of freight-handlers.

Apparently, they now only waited for some one, and the gentleman on watch well knew for whom.

Then, at full speed, a carriage reached the dock, the driver sprung from his seat, threw open the door, and his fare stepped leisurely out.

A minute more, and they were on board.

Still the man under the awning lingered.

Could one have seen the face under that slouched and dripping hat, it would have been a study.

Anxiety, apprehension, hope and fear were mingled with an expression, which, dark though it was, seemed to be lighted by sulphuric flames from Hades.

"They cannot fail now," muttered the man, as he gazed at the vessel; "surely they will not fail me now!"

"The fellow, curse him!—and she my queenly one have gone on board and as yet I see nothing of those villains who are to do my work. They must act promptly if they are to act at once. I cannot lose her—I cannot lose everything for which I have risked so much, now," came in a hiss from the man's lips.

"Confound that milk-and-water brother of hers! Why the deuce should there have been any need of this? He is certain to go soon in the course of nature, but, while he does hang on, there is never any knowing what may happen. I have seen, from the start, that my chances with the sister are nil while he is above ground, or, above water. No, he must go!"

"She's the only woman on earth I ever really cared for. To her Rose is as water is to wine!"

"Dolores would have been madly in love with me by this time, but for the hateful influence of that petted milk-sop. I have thought more than once recently that she was beginning to care for me; but he—he always hated me, and he would make her despise me in a little time. Yes, hold me lower than the worm she sets her dainty foot upon!"

"But my time is coming. It is here. I will settle my little account with him to-night. That secures to me the Davenant estate; and then for the Davenant beauty!"

"I don't know why I should feel so infernally nervous, though. It can't be on account of what I have gone through. By Jove, that never troubled me much."

"They say there are things in every man's past life he would like to forget. I don't know how that is. I would like to forget Rose, she doesn't seem worth taking into consideration now. So long as she doesn't seek to interfere with me in any way, she can live her own life, and be as though I had never been—"

The dim light of a few lamps fell here and there upon the dock, and a thin streak lay yellow and sickly looking upon the gang-plank up which Dare Davenant and his sister disappeared.

The last piece of baggage had been handed in. The last order had rung out from the hoarse throat of Captain Bill Barnacle of the North Star.

James Endicott's purpose was before him. His vengeance was coming, so he felt it, into his hands; and still and triumphant with the look of a demon upon his dark face he awaited it.

The gang-plank had already been hauled in, and still there were no signs of the murderous tools for whose act he waited.

Could they have played him false?

The villain leaned against a post breathless, his heart throbbing with its weight of fear and hope.

At once the two men appeared from the deck, followed by some one; but in the darkness he could not identify him.

They halted by a pile of trunks, and one of the men, disguised as a porter, asked:

"Are these your baggage, Mr. Davenant?"

"Yes. All that are marked D. D."

"This box, too?" inquired the man, passing around behind the mountain of luggage and by the guards.

The young man followed him and bent over to examine the case thus designated.

The packet had veered around and soon would be clear of her moorings.

"What is the address?" questioned Dare.

"I can't make it out."

The young man stooped still lower.

A blow, a fall, unheard amid the noise and bustle on board the departing vessel; then a splash in the water alongside the pier, and the two ruffians sprung on shore as the vessel swung off, and was headed down the bay.

Dolly Davenant had sailed, but Dare, for whom she was taking the voyage, had been left behind!

CHAPTER X.

WELL MET.

ALL the misery that Vivian Fairfax had endured in silence all these long years, since Rosalind had left her home, seemed to him to be concentrated in the few minutes that followed his interview with James Endicott on Boston Common.

He felt that he had failed, and that all he might henceforth do must end in failure.

Vivian returned to his home and sought solace in occupation. Weary in body and mind, and spirit, haggard and worn out in appearance, he felt glad of this quiet corner, lonely, and full of sad associations though it was, in which he might sink now and then into a mental lethargy, which he misnamed rest.

Months passed. It was an evening of bleak December, cold and white and wet.

Vivian Fairfax was in New York. He had been in the city for some days on business, and was sitting alone that night in his apartment at the hotel.

The great city was full of amusements, for the gay season had quite begun. It was full of Vivian's friends, for that matter, but he remained at his hotel. All places were alike to him. Memory was busier with him that night than usual—memory, the sweetest consoler, the cruellest torturer!

He heard a voice at the door, followed by a slight tap.

"He will see me," the voice said; and a waiter flung open the door and announced:

"Mr. Hamilton!"

"Hugh!" exclaimed Vivian, starting up from the semi-stupor into which he had fallen; and with a cordiality that had not been usual with him of late, catching his visitor by both hands.

To see Hugh Hamilton again—how strange it was! And yet why should it be so? He was a man who came and went like a comet, and whose stay in one place was never long enough to make people weary of him. It had been more than four years since he and Vivian last met.

They had been classmates at college, these two, and dear friends; but it was not a thought of these early days, the brightest and best that Vivian had known, that he was so deeply stirred by Hugh's appearance so abruptly at this time.

His last visit had been the spring before little Rose Fairfax had vanished, and taken both spring and summer out of her brother's life.

The heart of the young man was beating with mingled emotions. He was not strong. The constraint he had put upon himself for years had told upon his system. He was as nervous as a girl.

But with Hamilton it was otherwise. The frank, blonde beauty of his face was unclouded. He returned the startled and effusive greeting of his host in his characteristic warm conventional manner, threw off his heavy ulster and sat down.

For a full minute, he scanned the face of his old friend without speaking.

"You don't look well, Fairfax," he said at length, half roughly, half sympathetically.

"I am not well, Hugh; that is, I have not been quite myself lately. There is nothing really the matter with me you know; but I cannot forget."

Neither can any of us, unfortunately. But, all the same it's the best thing we can do very often, and we ought at least to make the attempt."

"I know it," was the reply, "but I mustn't bore you with my feelings. You'll excuse it, I hope. When did you arrive?"

"Only a week ago! Heard you were in the city and so looked you up."

"Glad you did, Hamilton—very glad! What have you been doing with yourself this evening?"

"Dropped into the theater for an hour or two *pour passer le temps*. Pretty woman St. Evremont is."

"Whom did you say?"

"Miss St. Evremont the actress! Did you never see her?"

"No, I think not."

"Think not? As if a man wouldn't remember her if he had seen her. Reminds me, by-the-way, of some one I have seen."

Then, after a quick glance at his friend, he exclaimed:

"*Caramba!* yes—the most astonishing—"

"What did you say?" inquired Fairfax.

"Nothing," said the other, quickly. "I was thinking of something else. I beg your pardon."

Hugh Hamilton was a young gentleman who had managed to fulfill his calling in life—and it would have puzzled one to have made out what that vocation was—without being in the least touched by anything like the tender passion. More than that he was one who, by nature, temperament, education and habit seemed likely to remain thus exempt from the extremes of life's sweets and bitters.

He was, though, neither a passionist nor a misogynist, to take calm and prosaic views of life.

He had met with more than one of the fair sex in his time in whose companionship he had

found much that was piquant and entertaining; and he had, on such occasions, felt inclined to enjoy that kind of society as much as was possible without putting himself to any trouble or inconvenience.

But he seldom remembered anything of it for very long afterward. He was not apt to waste any of his leisure moments in thinking about the fair face that, for a time, had beamed into his own; and he never caught himself wondering when he should look upon it again.

"Seems to me, Fairfax," he said, "apropos of that charming retirement of yours on the Hudson, that its great advantage is that you can, in a great measure, escape from and forget this noisy, vulgar nineteenth century."

"On the same principle, I suppose," remarked Vivian, "that bats and owls haunt old buildings. Or as we are told of a certain class of individuals who love darkness rather than light."

"I'm glad if I have succeeded in making you laugh, old fellow, even if it is at a pet and cherished theory of mine. But honestly, the more I see of the world, the less patience I have with many of our latter-day productions."

"And, for my part," said Fairfax, "recluse though I am, I have no taste for either music, literature, or for dead and buried antiquities. If I care to discuss anything, it must be fresh and living; the latest discoveries, for instance, and the social and political questions of the day."

"Then I think you ought to go in and enjoy life; for you have them to the full."

"I think so, too, Hamilton; and I am often heartily ashamed of myself for being a drone in the hive."

"With us, people seem alive and awake, and I am confident that they can see further ahead than people do elsewhere. If I am to belong to any party, give me the party of the future."

"Just so; but I'm not such an out and out worshiper of the Fourth Estate, and all the other fetishes of the present day, as most of my fellow countrymen are. The whole thing is repulsive to me."

"I honestly believe that the cheap newspaper press has done, and is doing, much more harm than good to the country. People are taught to look out every day for sensational paragraphs, which are pretty sure to be contradicted the next—or ought to be if they are not—and just to satisfy this morbid craving, all sorts of startling news must be invented. You can see for yourself just how it is. The mischief acts and reacts."

"No cause is served in this way. Our best men are liable to be reviled in the coarsest manner by some boy very likely who has just left school. I tell you, Fairfax, it is killing out every healthy sentiment of reverence among our people."

"Do you know, Hugh, I think that kind of talk is little short of blasphemy? I hold that what you are condemning is the glory of the country."

"Oh! you do?"

"Most assuredly I do. Our newspapers have done more for us than all our colleges."

Hamilton laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Then of course," he said, "you admire the way in which questions of all kinds are discussed and crimes are detailed—the influence of these upon the women, at all events, must be very elevating."

"What a vandal you are, Hugh?"

"Pardon me. It is those of whom we are speaking who are the Goths and Vandals of this generation, laying their ruthless and unhalloved hands on literature and art, and everything that is venerable and beautiful both in our national and domestic life."

"You ought to have been born in the middle ages," said his friend, with a laugh.

"Possibly so," was the answer; "but what age you would put some of the specimens which disgrace this, I must say is beyond me."

"Oh, they are quite at home with the present generation."

"Are they? Then all I have to say is, I am sorry for the present generation."

As this was clearly unanswerable, Vivian made no attempt at a reply.

"I had a pleasant little encounter," said Hamilton, later, as he rose to take his leave, "with a sweet specimen of what this age produces—and, hang it, I knew the fellow as a boy before our Yale days, you know."

"Met him since you have been here, you say?"

"No. Three or four months ago, at Nantasket. He's a Bostonian, save the mark! He didn't remember me at the time, but I think he is likely to do so after this. I made an impression on him, I fancy."

"How did it happen? Tell me, Hamilton."

"It was at the Beach, as I said. The fellow had come down only the evening before. I knew him at a glance, but kept clear of him. He was with a fast crowd, as I might have expected from him, knowing what he was in his blushing adolescence."

"But you met, nevertheless, it seems?"

"We did just that. A pretty little dark-eyed beauty—somebody's governess, you know—was there in charge of a pair of half-fledged pullets—spoiled brats they were—and she attracted no little attention, lady though every cubic inch of

her; any one could see that—I mean any gentleman could."

"But your friend apparently did not?"

Hamilton went on without heeding this:

"She was alone on the beach that day; it was about noon, and few were stirring. I saw her from a little distance, seated in the shadow of a rock, and with a book in her hand, and, Fairfax, between you and me, she was well worth looking at."

"Well done, Hugh. I never thought you were so susceptible," said Vivian.

"If you think I haven't an eye for beauty anywhere, old fellow, you're decidedly mistaken."

"However, I saw that my friend, as you call him, had a glimpse of her, and was going at a quick pace, for him, in that direction. I made up my mind to follow suit."

"Quite right. Though I would never have accused you of it."

"Oh, you wouldn't? Many thanks. Well, I did, nevertheless. As I came up, I saw that the young lady had started violently, and that he was bowing and smiling as though he was an old acquaintance."

"How did you know he wasn't?"

"I soon found out. She turned her gaze again upon her book without noticing him."

"How deeply you seem buried in thought," I heard the fellow say, in his most dulcet tones.

"Your book must be a very interesting one to absorb your attention so closely."

"He bent down as if to take it from her. She moved slightly, but it was only to turn her back upon him. The scoundrel burst into a laugh."

"'Pon honor, do you know,' he said, 'you're perfectly grand; awfully grand! Were you never on the stage? You act so splendidly, some fellows might be taken in by it; but I've gone through all that, do you know?'"

"Your remarks are impertinent," she answered, without turning to look at him, "and your presence is an intrusion. You have the appearance of a gentleman, so you ought to know how to behave like one."

"Do you know, Fairfax, she didn't even pay me the compliment of seeming to be annoyed by him."

"This irritated him. He stooped down, and the next I heard was—"

"Of all the hard-hearted angels I ever saw you are the most—charming. But you shall speak to me! Sweetheart and prettiest—"

"She started up at that instant, and the kiss the vile tramp had aimed fell on her hair."

"Her pale face and flaming eyes at that moment made him shrink back. The idea seemed to dawn upon him that he had made a mistake. The girl had not called for assistance, and I refrained from stepping upon the scene until my presence should be required. But she was equal to the occasion."

"The same impulse seemed to possess her that every brave man feels when he has received a blow. One insult must be wiped out by another."

"Her sun umbrella lay on the rock near her. She caught it up and struck him a sharp blow across the face."

"Take that, you coward!" she said, in a firm voice.

"It was altogether unexpected. She stood her ground, not attempting to run, which he evidently thought she would do. He sprang forward, and attempted to catch her in his arms."

"Just then I appeared. As I raised my cane, to chastise the puppy as he deserved, he started back in no little alarm, I fancy."

"Unluckily for him the rock on which he stepped was covered with slimy sea-weed. His foot slipped, and over he went into a pool of water."

"He was up again in a moment, choking and spluttering, holding his hands up to his half-blinded eyes. The young lady had quietly resumed her seat, in precisely the same spot. To my surprise, quite as much as his, she said with most perfect calmness:

"I should advise you to return to the hotel and change your clothes."

"He took one look at me—such a look! and then took the advice of the lady on the rock."

"And you had recognized the scamp, Hugh?"

"I knew him the first moment I set eyes upon him."

"Well, as you remarked, he is not likely to forget that little episode," said Fairfax.

"If one might only hope it would do him good, but it won't. I know what he was as a boy, and I have heard of more than one escapade of his since he has come to the years of discretion."

The two friends had now reached the portico, and Hamilton continued, as he held out his hand:

"The rascal actually masqueraded one summer, four or five years ago, I learn, under the name of Hatrick—"

"Good God!"

"For Heaven's sake, what's the matter, Fairfax?"

"A sudden twinge of pain," was the reply, and Vivian really looked it.

"I am subject to them," he added after a pause. "What did you say the fellow's name was?"

"His real name? Oh, Endicott—Jim Endicott!" was the response of Hugh Hamilton.

CHAPTER XI.

ON BOARD THE NORTH STAR.

DOLURES DAVENANT had already taken possession of her state-room when her brother, who was busy arranging some small packages on the table in the saloon, was approached by a man in the garb of a porter.

"I beg your pardon, boss," he said, "but would you mind steppin' this way a minute, an' 'identifyin' some baggage? Things is liable to git mixed."

Dare followed the man to the gangway, where they were joined by another.

Stricken down by the cowardly blow of the assassin, as we have seen, and his body thrown overboard, the packet went on her way, not a soul being aware of the fact that Dare Davenant was no longer on the vessel.

His sister returned to the saloon and not finding him, resumed the work of putting her very contracted quarters in as good shape as possible. This occupied her for some time, and when she again entered the cabin and saw nothing of Dare, she concluded that he must already have retired, and as she began to feel unpleasant sensations from the motion of the vessel she decided to follow his example.

The storm which had been so threatening the previous night ceased before the morning dawned, and the sun arose out of the Atlantic, and was henceforth for days and days in its rising and setting to be the one reminder to the souls on board that they were still on the planet which men call earth.

An hour after sunrise, Dolly Davenant had made her toilette, and was in the saloon.

At the first appearance of the steward, the young lady inquired for her brother, and was told that he was not yet visible. Not wishing to disturb his slumbers she went on deck, and for some time enjoyed to the full that sense of freedom, which comes to us nowhere so strongly as at sea.

Returning to the cabin and finding that Dare had not yet put in an appearance, she resolved as the morning was now somewhat advanced, that the young man's supposed laziness should be no longer indulged. She therefore gave orders that he should be called.

I will not attempt to describe the consternation on board the North Star, when it was discovered that Dare Davenant was missing. Far less shall I try to depict the anguish of the young girl thus suddenly and mysteriously left alone.

That Dare had not remained behind was certain. Several of the hands were positive that they had seen him after the gang-plank had been hauled in.

Dolly herself was quite persuaded in her own mind that when she left her brother in the cabin the night before, the vessel had already left the dock.

The only conclusion, the one arrived at on the instant by every one, was that the ill-fated young man had fallen overboard; and that owing to the darkness and the violence of the wind and rain the accident had not been observed.

Dare Davenant was near-sighted and feeling probably unwell, had gone on deck. The night had been a terrific one, the earlier part of it, and thus the casualty was easily explained.

For the poor bereaved girl there was nothing now left but to submit to the inevitable.

Go on, as she had set out, she must. Nay, even had there been opportunity for her to return, she would have shrunk from availing herself of it. The one horror before her now, was the thought of going again to her home. She would put off the evil day, for so, strange to say, it seemed to her, as distant as she could. No, James Endicott was there, the man whom she had dreaded, scarce knowing why; and now that he was her father's heir, now that her old home was hers no longer, she cared no longer to revisit it.

This cousin of hers, with his diabolical handsome face, had been her terror when he left, and was her terror now when she thought of her probable return. Return, indeed! She cared not ever to return.

Dare had brought on board ample funds for them during their projected stay in the South. These providentially were not on his person; so the poor girl would not be destitute when she reached her journey's end. Besides this, she had her jewels—of considerable value—and her own little income, she could continue to draw. This was her own, independent of Endicott.

She was resolved what to do. She would as soon as practicable after their arrival in Texas, put herself under the protection of some family with whom, for the present, at least, she would seek a home.

Though viewing the situation sad and dispiriting as it was, in such a philosophical manner, and, as we have seen, feeling equal to present emergencies, it was, nevertheless, some days before Dolly felt quite up to taking her place among her fellow-passengers and listening calmly to the unending comments on the calamity with which the voyage had opened.

When, at length she made an effort to for-

get self for the time, it was only with the rough but honest and hearty skipper that the bereaved girl felt the least at home.

No more excellent seaman was there anywhere afloat, than Captain Bill Barnacle.

Not yet past middle age, slightly above the middle height, stalwart and sunburnt. He was anything but illiterate, though his language at times would lead one to infer that such was the case; he was at heart one of the most amiable of men, and without the least nautical assumption.

When Dolly first joined the captain on deck, they were already in the Gulf of Mexico.

The day was a perfect one, but the calm was profound, the green and placid water running like a surface of oil into the sultry horizon, where the sea-line was even now, winter though it was, trembling in a haze of heat, and here and there was indistinguishable from the sky.

"Well, miss," said Captain Bill, when he had seen his fair passenger comfortably seated, "this ain't bad for what ye might call a 'waterscape,' is it! Artists, you know, and that sort of people are strong on landscapes, but men of my calling go on the other tack; and I reckon this wouldn't make a bad pictur' neither, far as it goes."

"It appears to go quite a long way, captain," said the young lady, with a smile.

"Right you are, Miss Davenant! Quite a considerable way, and it's goin' to take us a considerable time to get over it if this weather lasts. It's a right purty sight though."

"That it is," said Dolly, "but the most beautiful things are not always the most useful."

"Correct again, miss; but there's exceptions, heaps o' them. What, f'r instance, can be purtier'n this craft? an' when it comes to usefulness thar ain't many, I reckon, can get away with her."

Captain Barnacle was not far wrong. The vessel, calm though the sea and sky was, presented a picture in her trim beauty upon the green malachite-like surface of the Gulf, that was most pleasing, especially when there was nothing else of the kind within sight to compare with it.

A couple of feet of her copper, all glittering now and streaming with wet, was above the water; while the center folds of her symmetrical canvas, that looked like marble against the blue, flapped lazily against the masts, and sent across the wide waste of waters the musical clanking of chains, now and then the chafing of blocks, and the rattle of the rigging.

Dolly Davenant had the poetic and artistic soul which not her deep grief and anguish could stifle.

"It is more than beautiful, Captain Barnacle," she remarked, after a brief silence; "if my poor brother were only here to enjoy it with me I should have little left to wish for. Then I could say from my heart, all things wear a new and a strange beauty."

"But he is gone! Buried in the deep, cruel sea, and I behold even the most glorious thing in nature through a mist of tears."

"Avast there, now!" exclaimed the honest skipper. "Belay that! I mean cheer up, Miss Davenant. He doesn't suffer any more, you know, and we can't tell but what if he'd been spared, his life might have been anything but a blessing to him."

"Thank you so much, captain, for all your kindness since I have been on board with you. Your goodness will never be forgotten. A grateful heart finds faint expression in words; but if you should ever be ill, or need my help in any way, I shall try very hard to repay a part of the debt I owe you."

The debt's all on the larboard side this time, miss. You make an old salt like me a leetle too stuck up for his business when you talk like that. The No'th Star hasn't brought luck to you, this trip—more's the pity!—but I'm dead sure Miss Davenant you'll bring luck to it."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said Dolly smiling.

That afternoon Dolly indulged in quite a long sleep; the most refreshing that she had enjoyed since her first night on board.

When she awoke toward evening the wind had freshened and the packet was plunging along on the rough waves, staggering as though she were some drunken marine monster. The usually placid Mexique Sea was tempestuous as the ocean—vast, stormy and threatening. But the weather suited Captain Bill Barnacle and the sailors. There was no real danger, they well knew; and it lessened every hour the distance between them and port.

Dolly Davenant from watching the elements fell into a reverie. As they drew nearer to their destination her eyes seemed already to view it; and she saw nothing of the storm around her.

In her imagination, she pictured to herself a quiet southern home, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife;" a home in which she would be free from the peril which she could not help feeling still threatened her, where she could be free from every kind of social thrall-dom, and could forget the past."

Generously, as was the fair girl's nature, she had, since her loss, banished, as far as was possible for her, all memory of it, lest even its

shadow should fall like a cloud on those around her.

She stifled the agony that she suffered lest its expression should give pain to those who felt for her.

No longer could Dolly Davenant look forward to a home circle, to even one of her own kindred, anywhere upon earth who would welcome her, or whom she would be rejoiced to meet.

And now the land of the stranger was hourly growing nearer, and, when she should step upon it, she would indeed be a stranger in the land.

But her mind was made up. There she would remain.

As these thoughts of the near future, and of the fresh struggles that might be awaiting her, came pressing upon her anguished heart, and fevered brain, the voice of Captain Barnacle broke in upon her troubled musings:

"I clear forgot to say, Miss Davenant, when we were speaking about your affairs a spell back, that I can arrange it right snug for you in Indianola when we get in, long as you want to stay thar. 'Tain't much of a place, but it's quiet like and right healthy."

"Miss' Colonel Carraway lives close to the burg, an' she'd be right glad o' your company. It's long odds the best an' pleasantest part a young lady like you could strike; an' I'll settle it for you, if you say the word."

CHAPTER XII.

A THEORY OF HIS OWN.

THERE was one passenger with Captain Barnacle this trip, who was unable to persuade himself into the common belief on board in regard to the fate of Dare Davenant.

This man had taken passage on the North Star under the name of Thaddeus Bronson, and hailed from San Antonio, Texas; and such, indeed, was his name and destination. He was better known, however, through the western portion of the Lone Star State as "Texas Thad," and, by this designation I shall hereafter have occasion to speak of him.

He was a man of perhaps fifty, tall, thin and wiry in appearance. His face was brown, wrinkled and smoke-dried; and in his air and deportment he seemed totally indifferent to everything about him. He wore as though he had been born in it, the garb of the frontiersman, and he spoke the vernacular—that is, when he was heard to speak anything—in a way that told of one to the manor born or at all events of a use that had become second nature.

We have said that Texas Thad did not share the universally accepted verdict in the Davenant case. This was so. And yet he had never to his knowledge seen Dare Davenant.

But Thad had seen and conversed with Butternut Ben during the last day or two, and by him had been instructed to keep an eye on the happenings on board the packet. But alas for Ben's foresight in the case, when Texas Thad had begun to look around him and watch for "sign" as he would have expressed it, the catastrophe which in some form, his old partner had apprehended, had already taken place!

Butternut Ben while feigning to be asleep in the gambling saloon had heard enough of the conversation between Endicott and his pals to learn that a plot was being hatched up, which aimed at the life or liberty of a young man named Davenant, who, with his sister was to sail by the North Star on the following Tuesday morning. This much he gathered, but nothing more, except that Endicott himself was to start for Texas soon after, traveling by rail.

This made it certain that the object of Endicott's southern trip was Miss Davenant.

Ben's intention had been to accompany Texas Thad on the packet; but a lurking desire to visit the Crescent City en route was now to be gratified by what he had just learned. He decided that he would make the journey by land; and combining business with pleasure, would keep an eye on Endicott.

Thus resolved he gave all the points he possessed in the case to Texas Thad, who was to look out for the presence on board of the two ruffians whom Ben had heard conspiring with Endicott and a description of whom he furnished him with.

But nothing had been observed by Thad, who went on board at an early hour in the evening, and kept faithfully on the alert of the two hired assassins. He saw the Davenants when they came on board the packet, and recognized them as the lady and gentleman passengers for whom Captain Barnacle had been waiting. He heard the gang-plank hauled in and the last order given, and he waited to see and hear nothing further.

The danger if such there was, must reveal itself on the voyage, and Thad was resolved that he would penetrate every disguise, and discover on the morrow the two ruffians whom he had been set to watch.

The morning dawned bright and beautiful, and the old borderer was up betimes; but his vigilance was not to be rewarded. No such men as his pard had described were to be seen on the North Star.

Not only that, but a little later it was found that Dare Davenant was not to be found either.

Texas Thad chewed his tobacco in silence for

hours, and ruminated over the little that he had been able to learn in regard to the plot of the villain Endicott, and this unexpected and sudden *denouement*. The result was that he formed an entirely different opinion from the one which had been so hastily and universally adopted.

He believed that Dare Davenant was alive!

But though Texas Thad was convinced in his own mind that such was the case, he expressed no opinion on the subject one way or the other. It could do no good, he argued, and would only needlessly agitate the already terribly anguished sister of the young man.

So Thad kept silence even from good words.

Not only so, but when after two or three days had elapsed, and Dolly Davenant was seen moving among her fellow-passengers, the quaint-looking old Texan alone appeared not to notice her presence.

But there was an unexplainable something which seemed to draw the bereaved maiden, so young, so beautiful and refined to this uncouth and unsophisticated representative of so different a civilization.

With the single exception of the captain there was not a soul on board the vessel whom Dolly had ever seen before. To all intents and purposes she was in a new world and felt herself alone in it.

In such circumstances there is generally somewhere a magnetism which draws one so situated—a mysterious attraction for which we cannot account, which brings us gradually nearer and nearer to an object which reason and sense can invest with no attraction whatever.

Captain Barnacle had been kindness and delicacy itself, from the first moment that her dread loss had been made known to her, and he had promised, as the crowning act among his many kindnesses, to place her on their arrival in Indianola in the care of those who he knew would be the kindest and best of protectors to the poor girl as long as she chose to remain with them.

But, in spite of herself, some strange magnetism kept attracting Dolly Davenant, in her grief and loneliness, toward the quaint and silent old Texan, who scarce seemed to be aware of her presence.

For the last day or two of the voyage she hovered about him, not in an obtrusive way, but because she felt stronger and safer when she was near him, as if there was something trustworthy and protective in his presence.

When the storm came up, to which allusion has been made, and its violence was such that those who were not confined to their berths were obliged to take to the floor of the saloon for safety, Dolly had crept as near the frontiersman as she dared. But though she thus remained through the weary hours, he never once spoke to her or appeared to heed her presence, but instead remained wrapped in his own thoughts.

Whether these were pleasant or just the opposite, no one could have read from any expression of his face. Certain it was that the storm made no outward impression on him.

Suddenly the vessel rose upon a mighty wave. Up—up she went, until every trembling passenger held his breath with awe. Then she plunged headlong down into the raging deep with a sinking, sickening sensation, that chilled the blood and made the flesh creep with fear. But Texas Thad sat in his old position, leaning against a post that supported the roof of the saloon.

The next moment another terrific wave struck the packet with a noise like the roar of artillery and with a force which made her quiver like a frightened creature from stem to stern, and in the dread pause that followed, fraught with such horrible suspense, Dolly Davenant clasped her hands and, for the first time, cast an appealing glance at the strange man, who sat so unmoved within a few feet of her.

His face lighted strangely, and his smile was anything but grim and unsympathetic, as he asked:

"Afeard, leetle gal?"

Before Dolly could reply, the North Star gave another tremendous lurch, and the maiden was precipitated almost into the arms of the man to whom she had spoken.

This was their strange introduction.

Texas Thad caught her just in time to save her from being dashed against the post by which he was sitting, and when she had recovered her breath a little, he placed her gently on a seat beside him, keeping one strong arm around her to save her from a second fall.

"Purty roguish weather, this hyer, Miss Davenant," he remarked, in a kindly tone. "Air you afeard?"

"It startles me," said the young lady, "to have the vessel pitch and tremble so. I am not accustomed to traveling in this way and it does seem as though the dreadful waves would swallow us."

"Thar ain't no danger, I reckon," said the Texan. "I've been 'crost ther big drink right smart o' times, an' I've see'd storms what lay over this a heap. Hit don't never decompose me. Thar ain't but one thing I air raily 'feard of, and thet air fire."

As Thad said this, he felt the thrill of a fear

of fire that went vibrating through her whole frame, and he inwardly anathematized himself for having thus carelessly added to her apprehension. He hastened to say, assuringly:

"But ther' don't no axeridents o' thet kind happen one't in a coon's age, an' hit's nex' ter mor'ly impossible for a craft like this hyer ter conflagrate."

"Thar, sit clost by me," he continued, as another thundering mass of water swept over them. "Jist let me kinder keep my arm 'bout yer—I air a ole man, yer know—an' you'll be a heap safer'n settin' by yerself. Misfortun't ter be traveling alone, Miss Davenport."

This was another slip of the well meaning frontiersman, for which he felt like biting his tongue out a moment after. The young lady however, did not seem to view it as unfeelingly made, for, on the contrary, she answered as if appreciating the sympathy that dictated it.

"It is—it would be—were not every one so kind."

Dolly's voice faltered as she thus spoke, and Texas Thad was too deeply touched to reply.

The roar of the elements increased and further conversation was now out of the question, even had they been so disposed, which they appeared not to be.

The Texan let his head drop upon his broad chest and appeared at once to have forgotten his fair companion, the angry waters, the rolling vessel, and everything else without him.

Darkness again settled down upon them. The storm raged on, but Dolly Davenport, with a strange feeling of security in this new companionship, closed her eyes, her head sunk unconsciously upon the shoulder near her, and she slept sweetly and tranquilly the whole night through, a smile resting upon her face, and a sense of comfort and protection in her sad heart.

When morning broke the maiden found her rather uneasy position of the night before changed. She lay upon a heap of rugs, a pillow beneath her head, and a soft robe covering her.

The sun was now shining brightly into the cabin, where, only a few hours before all had been so dark and dismal. The sky was beautifully clear and blue, and without a vestige of the angry clouds which had threatened the vessel and all on board such a little while ago. The good craft was riding the gradually subsiding waves with strong and steady pulsations which seemed to have almost a sense of victory in their throbbings and all the terrors of the night seemed but a troubled dream of the past.

As Dolly Davenport stepped upon the deck she espied her friend standing aft, and looking out upon the silver-tipped dancing waves.

She glided to his side, and spoke a pleasant "Good-morning!" which fell like music on his ear.

The borderer turned and looked at her, an involuntary smile parting the firm lips, which evidently were unaccustomed to such relaxation.

"How bright it is," she said, gratefully.

"Hit air now, miss," he replied, with a respectful and admiring glance, which made his speech the somewhat broad compliment he intended.

She flushed slightly, but answered, smilingly: "Yes, it is indeed a glorious morning; and one can appreciate the calm and brightness after such a night as we have gone through."

"Hit's ther sort er mornin' thet allers gi'ns me a purty hefty appetite," remarked Thad, in a matter-of-fact manner, "an' I hopes yer feels ditto, miss. Air you hungry like?"

"Indeed, I am," Dolly answered, eagerly adding with a clear little laugh, the first that had been heard from her throughout the voyage, and which fell like music on the ear of her companion: "I am, indeed, hungry. Eating has been a lost art with me during the last few days, and I have considerable lost time to make up."

"Yer'll get yer appertite back, and yer sperits, I hopes, at ther same time, when yer is onc't settled on shore. Texas air fatches 'roun' thet condition o' things most mirackerlous. I hes see'd hit a heap o' times."

"I hope I shall like Texas," said Dolly, "I feel very much like making it my home for some time."

"At Injinoly, I reckon?"

"For the present," was the reply, "Captain Barnacle has been kind enough to offer to secure a pleasant place for me. It is just out of the town I believe."

"Maria Carraway's, shouldn't wonder?" said her friend.

"That is the name," said Dolly. "Do you know the place?"

"Like a book, miss, an' yer couldn't be better siterwated noways. I mought ha' knowed Bill Barnacle 'ud see't yer wouldn't be put out when yer arrived. He's squar' an' white, cl'ar through."

"He has been very kind to me. I can never forget his kindness and thoughtfulness," she replied.

Dolly saw nothing more of the man whom she had felt so strangely drawn to, until late in the afternoon, and they were then nearing port.

She was on deck trying to while away the time in reading when he approached in the old mechanical but frank and open manner.

"Yer is gittin' mighty uigh yer desternation now, Miss Davenport, an' I hopes yer'll meet with nothin' but pleasant 'periences from this one. Hit don't don't seem right an' nat'ral somehow thet yer shoudn't."

"Mebbe so yer'll be thinkin' later on, o' tryin' hit leetle furdur ter ther west'ard. Ef yer does, an' shu'd strike San Antone, yer mought need a friend, who yer knows; an' s'posin' yer does, yer mought do wuss nor light on ther old scout, Texas Thad."

"I shall never forget you, sir," answered Dolly, and afterward she had cause to recall her words to the old scout.

CHAPTER XIII.

STARTING ON THE TRAIL.

FOR hours after Hugh Hamilton had left him, Vivian Fairfax sat in his room motionless and speechless.

The strange information, thus let fall by his friend, in his easy, gossiping way—confirming the impression that had been his that day on Boston Common and which had never since entirely left him—seemed to paralyze him.

He could only remain thus, thinking bitter thoughts which had long refused to be buried out of sight and unable for the time to plan any future course of action.

James Endicott and Harry Hatrick were one and the same. So Hamilton had stated and Vivian could not, even if he would, have asked him more. But it was enough. He now knew the real name of his sister's betrayer, and there could no longer be any difficulty in tracing him.

For the first time since the shock of his sister's flight and presumable disgrace had been made known to him, the young man felt that all-pervading rage and fury within which so blinded him that he was unable to see his way clearly in the work he had to do.

He had never at any period in his life been in any way foolish or hot-headed and ready to rush in blindly where angels feared to tread. When the worst as he believed it, was known he submitted as we have seen in silence to the inevitable; and not a thought of seeking his wronged and erring sister, far less an idea of vengeance entered his mind, until his father died.

Then a feeling of utter loneliness brought back to Vivian memories of her who had been the light and life of the old home, and a desire to find her, in the shame and wretchedness which must now be hers; and to strive to bring back peace and rest to her weary heart.

Failing in his efforts, he had settled down once more but with, if possible, less interest in life than ever.

Now however, all was revived. But with the knowledge of the true name of the man who had wrought all this misery came dreams of vengeance that had never before entered his mind. Hatrick had been a shadow, a reflection of some evil. Endicott was a living, tangible reality.

"My name, the honored name of my father, which had been borne unstained for so many generations, now sullied and disgraced by that wretch's infamy!"

"And all this time I have been brooding over it in silence, and acting the part of a coward. That scoundrel must have recognized me that day, even before I told him my name, and now even he must despise me for my imbecility."

"But I shall end this, and the end is not far off. James Endicott and I shall meet again."

The crimson flush that had been upon his face since his friend had spoken the name of Hatrick, had died out now, and he had become as white as marble. It was not that the anger, the madness of the man had left him, it was only intensified, like the heat of iron when it changes from red to white.

The passionate pride of his race, which had lain dormant for years, now asserted itself. An imperious look, which those who knew him best would not have recognized as a familiar one, came into his eyes. The blood boiled in his veins, and the madness of jealous anger which was his unclaimed birthright, rose up at last and asserted itself.

"I know now whom I seek, and whom to hold accountable. The ghost of the wrong to me and mine, the disgrace upon our name has risen again, and will not be laid aside by philosophy or indifference."

"Rosalind! Sister Rosalind! Your wrongs shall be redressed!"

He started up in the new life and energy that had come to him, and pushing back the curtains of his window, looked long and deeply into the purple mystery of that chill and wintry night, black now, like so many days in his shadowed life.

"He said he was married, that day when I questioned him—a lie, probably—but if he really is, where then is she? Not with him now, of course, but she would not be in any event."

"I ought to have had presence of mind enough to have asked Hamilton something more in regard to the villain; but then, he probably knows but little."

"What I have to do I must work out by myself. He is, it is likely, still in Boston; but if not, it will not be difficult now to get on his track, and I will follow him to the Antipodes—ay, though he sought to conceal himself in the very center of the earth!"

And yet, fully determined as Vivian Fairfax was on his duty and his calling to fulfill it, this abrupt disturbance of his quiet, this rude tearing open an old wound, brought with it other thoughts and feelings than pleasant ones. It was encouraging, to be sure, that he had a new hope of finding Rosalind, the little sister whom he had never ceased to think of kindly; but in spite of the vengeful elation that filled the young man's heart, there came a feeling of sadness.

He almost groaned in spirit when, a day or two later, he entered his charming and home-like study, where everything spoke of peace, culture and refinement, and began his work of preparing for the duty that was laid upon him. He could not repress a sigh, now that his enemy was almost within his grasp, at the peace that must now be disturbed.

Vivian sighed when he reflected that the sins and sufferings, the violent passions and agonies of a world with which he would—oh, so gladly!—have little to do, could not be shut out of the quiet life he had chosen for himself.

Staid and settled though he seemed beyond his years, Vivian Fairfax had still the heart of a boy, and, until death should chill that warm heart forever, it must beat in sympathy with the joys and sorrows of those with whom he came in contact.

This was the secret of much of the young man's deserved popularity.

Young and old, all who were thoughtful, or high-souled or ambitious, sought his society, as that of one who could feel for them, who had suffered as many of them had suffered; who had wished their best wishes and enjoyed their highest pleasures, and who, though young in years, had solved many of their perplexities, conquered most of their temptations, and had in his solitude puzzled out for himself some kind of an answer to the perplexing riddle of life.

"I feel more than ever before in my life what it is to feel proud of my ancestors."

So said Vivian Fairfax as he made ready to leave, for an indefinite period, the home which was his, and had been theirs.

"In a house like mine," he continued, soliloquizing, "one can feel something of what it means. Everything that is here speaks to me. They all belong to me, but I also belong to them. As I stand here now, I seem to hear around me the voices of the dead. They are calling to me to keep up the unsullied honor of our house and name."

"I hear her voice, too—poor little Rosie!—I wonder is she living or dead?"

"They are all around me to-day and I stand among them. They all took their share, and did their work, bravely and manfully in life. There was not one of them, but kept our escutcheon spotless—not one who ever disgraced—"

He stopped, and his eyes filled with tears, as he thought of her who had brought such sorrow and supposed shame upon them, and for whose sake he was now setting out from the scenes and associations he so greatly loved.

"I loved her," he said, "I loved Rosalind as brother never loved sister before. In her was centered my every thought. She was my kingdom, my world; and I was jealous even of the flowers she touched, of the breeze that fanned her cheek."

"She loved me too, and she prized my love; but in time another came that supplanted it. I had dreamed of that; I had striven to prepare myself for it. It came and what was it? One of those serpents that lurk in every Eden, came, and trailed his slimy way into my paradise. I distrusted him from the first. Every one did."

"The jealousy which had been my one torment when there was no cause for it, became now a hell. The gossiping world began its whispers. I stood this until I was nearly crazed, and then I spoke to her."

"I told Rose what people were saying. I begged her to dismiss this man, to send him away from our home forever, as one in every way unworthy of her. But she would not listen to me."

"He was handsome, and courtly and honorable—so she said, God help her! and for the first time in our lives, we who had never known a shadow, parted in anger. Again I remonstrated but this time she was silent. When we parted then it was for the last time."

Vivian Fairfax came out of his library, and stood for a moment in the passage.

The moon was shining brightly through the caements upon the corridor above, and down through the skylight in the roof. He stood an instant thus at the head of the stairs, his heart beating loudly in the silence. To go or not to go?

If he broke up his cherished peace and retirement now, could he ever hope to have it restored? If he left the proud halls of the Fairfaxes to-night, would he ever return to them?

The old clock upon the wall near him ticked out a forlorn warning—"Forever, never;—never, forever," and for that moment he tried to think.

Should he now turn back at the eleventh hour and let the past rest in oblivion, now that he was, for the first time in possession of a clew that might enable him to redress the wrongs of his house?

The struggle was of short duration. It came and went like the whirlwind, leaving its marks behind.

Vivian hurried on, across the threshold of his fate.

After all he had been living only for self; and now, love and family pride combined had vanquished self.

James Endicott was not in Boston.

That much Vivian Fairfax was not long in ascertaining. Neither was he in New York, to which city Vivian had been directed when he returned thither.

But here Endicott, fearing nothing as yet, had taken no pains to conceal his tracks.

At the hotel where he had been stopping, it was found that the young gentleman—some-what dissipated in his habits they reported him to be—had left for the South. Further examination showed that he had taken tickets for New Orleans, traveling alone.

In four days more Vivian Fairfax was in the Crescent City. Endicott had been there at the St. Charles as well as at some other equally popular but less pleasant resorts; but he was there no longer.

Patient waiting and forming acquaintance with some of the *habitués* of places in which Endicott's soul delighted, was repaid with particulars of that worthy's next step.

This, however, was somewhat indefinite.

Endicott had left for Texas.

The length and breadth of the Lone Star State give a pretty wide margin either for the fugitive or for the imagination, and Fairfax could now pay his money and take his choice of routes and destinations.

Clearly he must know something a trifle more definite than this. He must come up with what Texas Thad would call "sign" before he should set out on the trail.

"Was it known if Mr. Endicott had gone by rail or steamer?"

No one could say really.

"Had he spoken of any object he had in view in this journey?"

He had not. He had referred once or twice to some friends whom he expected to meet. That might explain his Texas trip.

It might. Did Mr. Endicott ever mention the names of these friends of his?

Not to the knowledge of any one. He had been heard to say something in regard to Indianola. Possibly that might have been his objective point. In that case he must have gone by water.

Just so. And Mr. Fairfax would go by water, too.

Indianola was probably Endicott's last move, and it must be Vivian's next.

James Endicott, for some reason or other, it would seem was seeking a sunny clime, as a propitious sphere in which to continue the labor of his life—that of sowing wild oats; and Vivian Fairfax had made up his mind that the reaping time was now nigh at hand.

They are a fatally-exhausting crop, and never fail to bring a harvest of heart-aches and remorse; and the worst of it is that the sower is not always the only reaper. Society is to blame in this, first and last.

James Endicott was a society man.

He was upright and honorable, as these qualities go in the world, as long as it was exacted of him to be so; but finding that society, the best people whom he knew, required of him nothing more than parlor purity and company morals, he fell into the crowded ranks of those who sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

We may regret and deplore the evil ways of men as much as we please, but as long as there is no one in the world for whose morals we feel that we are responsible, we are neither reformers nor philanthropists.

It was in neither of these *roles*, though well fitted to perform his part in both, that Vivian Fairfax was about to visit Texas.

His work was that of vengeance. The trail upon which he started was that of the avenger.

He went to Indianola, where we have already seen him; and there, as we have seen too, he saw Dolores Davenant.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

JAMES ENDICOTT did not go to Indianola, as had been somewhat hastily said. The knowledge of the projected movements of the Davenants for the winter, which he had obtained, was to the effect that they proposed locating for some little time in San Antonio.

It was natural to suppose that they had made arrangements beforehand for their accommodations in that city; and now that Dare had mysteriously vanished, his sister would doubtless continue her journey, as they had at first intended.

A few days, therefore, after leaving New Orleans Endicott was in the Alamo City.

He was not gratified by finding that Miss

Davenant had arrived; but he felt that he could afford to wait patiently for that event, especially as he was not long in making some congenial acquaintances, and dropping into the only kind of life that was agreeable to him.

There was no longer any necessity in a pecuniary point of view, of his continuing these practices, as his future, financially, did not now depend upon the turn of a card. The last and vilest act of his vile and cowardly life had secured to him the Davenant estates; and the hand of the daughter of the house of Davenant was not likely to be refused to him now.

His first day at the hotel brought him into quite an intimacy with a young Louisiana Creole, Maxime Legere, better known as "Monte Max," and the latter was faithfully doing his part as *cicerone*.

Arm in arm the pair of worthies were now going down a street, after having crossed the Military Plaza.

"Where is that infernal saloon, you spoke of?" inquired Endicott.

"Down the street yonder," said the Louisiana.

"The Three Brothers, or *Los tres Hermanos*, as the Greasers call it. This is a good time, by the way, to catch those fellows in. They have a game of monte running there all the time."

"Keep it on draft, eh?"

"Something of that kind," said Max.

"Then let us hurry on. I don't want to come up with those roughs we struck last night. If we could meet them where a revolver-shot or a sly dig with a knife would fix things for one or both of them, I wouldn't care a continental."

James Endicott was nothing of the "tenderfoot" in appearance or language. Dressed and "heeled" to order, and apparently at home in the set among whom he mingled, it was evident that his stay in Texas, short though it had been, was nevertheless sufficient to have *acclimatized* him.

"But, after all," he continued, his thoughts probably reverting to the object which had brought him hither, "a street-fight and the notoriety that follows such things wouldn't suit just now."

"Nor at any time," assented Monte Max; "but let's go ahead and hunt up our Mexican allies."

Turning a corner, the pair headed toward a well-known gambling saloon.

At that moment two men, coming in an opposite direction, sighted them.

One paused. He was a man of fine physique and striking in his personal appearance generally; the same in short whom we have seen seated in the saloon in New York City, separated by a screen from Endicott and the desperadoes in his employ.

His companion stopped also.

"What is it, Ben?" he said.

"Pink," said Butternut Ben, "ain't that thar thar durned scamp Monte Max, thar gambler?"

"Kee-rect," replied Prairie Pink, so called from his youthful and generally fresh appearance. "The very cuss, sure as yer is born. I've an old score, an' a purty heavy one to settle with the rooster. Let's keep an eye on the brace of 'em."

"I've seen thar sweet-scented pink what's with him somewhar 'fore now. Thar's somethin' dog-goned fermihar in his gin'ral get-up, an' I'm boun' ter spot him. Cur'ous I disremember whar I lit on him."

By this time Endicott and his new-made friend had entered the bar-room, where several Mexicans and others were drinking and gambling. The sight, apart from its rowdy and vicious character was a picturesque one, and suited the aesthetic taste of the cultured Bostonian amazingly.

They went up to the bar, chatted for a moment or two with some whom they seemed to have met previously; then ordered drinks, and sat down.

"I don't care a picayune," said Endicott, "if that Pink or whatever you call him, is laying for you. Why the deuce should that scare you I should like to know? Had another blow-out last night with you had he? Well, all right I say. There are two of us, and the sooner we come up with them the better."

Max stepped to the door and at once returned. "Hang me," he exclaimed, "if they ain't coming this way now. I'll bet they've spotted us, and are following us right in here."

"Well," returned his pal, "you're armed, are you not? Let them come."

"Armed! I should just think I was armed. You never catch me asleep without one eye open. But that ain't the point. I've a leetle racket ahead for this evening, which a fight now would be certain to spoil, let it go whichever way it would."

"I see," said Endicott, who with all his bravado, had no objection to having a loophole of escape pointed out.

"Back door here," said the Creole, indicating it.

"I see," remarked Endicott the second time.

Monte Max passed out, and the brave Bostonian "passed" also, for neither of them, evidently, had the slightest intention of "ordering it up" on the hands they held.

As they disappeared, Butternut Ben and his pards entered the saloon.

A single glance around satisfied them that the pair they had seen enter but a minute ago were no longer there, and Prairie Pink looked not a little disappointed.

Butternut Ben seemed to take it more philosophically. He had learned in his career, which had been a longer and more checkered one than that of his pard, to labor and to wait.

"Wal, ther suckers hev gone," he remarked, "an' I reckon I mought es well take a sot down. Dog'd ef I wouldn't like ter ha' see'd who ther sharp ar' thet Monte Max ar' pardin' with. Hit strikes me he b'ars the sign o' some high-toned gerloot what I hes see'd somewhar in civerlize, though he don't make up like a tender-foot w'ith a cent."

"He's ther same rooster," said Pink, "what I seed pickin' his teeth inter ther Menger Hotel yesterday, an' reckon he hangs out thet-a-way. How long 'fore yer 'spect ter start on ther trail again, pard?"

"I air layin' aroun' waitin' for a train, er somethin' o' thet kind what I sorter 'spects in from Matagordy way. At ther same time I shouldn't be s'rprised ef I fell in with a card-sharp from the East 'bout hyer, what I reckon'll be waitin' in San Antone fer ther same lay out. I reckon they be 'long tereckly."

"Comin' from Mattie Gordy!"

"Ya-as; leastways Injinoly. Come out from New York by packet. Texas Thad what I pard-ed 'long with on ther Mediny, war up thar with me, an' he took passage on ther packet. Ther gay gerloot what I had my peepers on, come out ter New Orleans 'long o' me, but I lost his trail thar."

"How did that happen, Pard Ben?"

"Oh, I didn't keer to keep close ter it," said the other carelessly. "He's a-comin' this-a-way—mor'ly boun' ter be hyer. 'Kase why, thar's a piece o' caliker on thet train, what he's lookin' arter."

"Is ther gal travellin' this-a-way, without any natral protection, so ter speak?" inquired Prairie Pink. "Hain't ther no fool 'sylvums et ther North?"

"They'd be full chock up, if thar war," was the reply of Ben. "But ther leetle gal ain't erlone, I don't reckon. A brother o' hern, what don't count fer much, 'kase why, he's kinder consumptive er somethin' air on ther v'yage. They is makin' ther trip fur es I cud determine on ther young tenderfoot's 'count."

"I gut wind o' some foul play, 'fore they sot out, an' this cuss, what I'm lookin' fer ther trail of now in San Antone, war et ther bottom o' hit. Pard Thad an' me thort we'd make ther honors easy, so he took ship, an' I set out on ther trail o' ther sweet-scented kiote what I's bin speaking of."

"Jist so. Well, they're all right on ther packet, I reckon, if ther cuss what means mischief traveled 't'her way," suggested Pink.

"Dunno," said Butternut Ben, with a sober look; "thar war some deviltry a-hatchin'—I didn't rightly git a holt on it—an' this byer cuss hed two pards o' his'n detailed fer ther performance of it."

"Ther bestest thing, I c'd do, ter sarcumvent ther devils, war ter put Thad on ther trail o' ther two pilgrims what I just got my two peepers onter onc't an' make ther high-toned cuss my speshul charge."

"Ye reckon they is in Injinoly yit?"

"Damfino," said Ben, contracting the three words into one. "They'd orter bin, ef ther seasarpint didn't run foul o' them, an' they hedn't no gospil-sharps aboard as Jonahs. When they hes arrived lit won't be long, I don't reckon, 'fore Texas Thad strikes San Antone; an' ef they 'cides on comin' this-a-way ter onc't, he'll fotch 'em erlong."

"An' yer thinks the cuss what yer 'spectin' air on ther lookout fer ther gal?"

"I know hit, pard. Yer see ther's right smart o' wealth somewhar in ther case, an' ther tenderfoot what ther leetle gal air comin' hyer 'long-er, air what stan's in ther way. Ther 'tention air, ef ther two hellyuns what I see'd makes ther rifle, thet he don't block ther passage but a passin' period."

"When he's outer ther way, ther piece o' cahker'll be et ther marcy o' ther condemned kiote what hes bin plottin' ter sen' her brother over the sky range."

"Ther cuss is her nighest blood kin, hit 'pears. I reckon he's about ther bloodiest kin she's got."

When Endicott and Monte Max left the saloon, to avoid meeting Prairie Pink and his unknown pard, they proceeded at once to the Menger House, where the latter had some legitimate business of his own to attend to; in other words, he was busily, and generally profitably engaged in "roping in" unsuspecting strangers, and giving them a show at cutting their eye-teeth, in some of the "ways that were dark and tricks that were vain," in which the delectable Monsieur Legere was well known to be a proficient.

James Endicott went at once to his room, and occupied himself in the decidedly, to him, novel business of corresponding with the executors of the Davenant estate, of which he was now the recognized heir.

Though, not only had his wretched instruments assured him that their bloody work had been successfully performed, but he had himself taken care to see that it was so; it was not until after the arrival of the North Star in Indianola, and the sad intelligence had been telegraphed back, that the fact of Dare Davenant's death was known to any except the three guilty conspirators.

When the news came, James Endicott was of course in New Orleans, and thither it was dispatched to him. He wrote home all needful instructions to his lawyers, informed them that business would probably detain him at the South until the spring, and meanwhile suggested that communications to him should for the present, be addressed to San Antonio.

With a handsome fortune now his own, and every incentive to reform, and become outwardly at least a respectable member of society, the successful villain seemed bent on becoming more degraded than ever. Though well aware that he could only hope to commend himself to the favorable notice of a girl like Dolores Davenant, by assuming the deportment and conduct of a gentleman, he persisted in doing just the opposite.

Caught in the toils, it would perhaps have been impossible for him now to be otherwise in appearance from what he was at heart, but he did not make a solitary effort in that direction.

His *blase* face bore ample witness now to the life of debauchery he had been leading from his boyhood; and the dress and character which he now assumed, marked him even in the chaotic society of the little Spanish-American city for what he was.

Later in the evening the two pards, Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink entered the office of the Menger.

It was almost deserted, for the sky was clear, and the air dry and warm without, and few whom business did not detain remained within doors.

"I be dog'd, Pard Pink," said the old scout, as he approached the desk, "ef I hain't more tired o' civerlize then I ever war afore in my borned days! It's all o' three moons sence I has bin on ther trail, an' I feels as rusty as an ole Colt what hed bin planted all winter an' resurrected."

"When yer strikes ther trail o' thet cuss from ther States, yer'll begin ter feel nat'ral ag'in," replied Pink. "Yer dead sure ye'r hain't lost bit, I hope."

Butternut Ben gave his young pard a look in reply to his remark, that ought to have annihilated him. He then turned to the desk, and began examining the register.

It was soon apparent that the old scout was not an expert in chirography. He called Pink to his side.

"What yer make outen that, pard?" he asked, pointing to an autograph on the page before him.

"James M. Endicott," read out his pard. "Wa-al, drag me to ther bone-yard!" yelled Ben. "Thet are my man!"

CHAPTER XV.

"BY THE SAD SEA WAVES."

THE loss of any one to whom one has clung through life, is the very climax of human woe. Truly—

"Sorrow's crown of sorrow
Is remembering happier days."

But to some few exceptional sufferers there is a still more bitter drop to be drained from the cup of life.

It is the sad conviction that is now and then forced upon us, after the loved one's death, that he or she was not as worthy of our devotion as we once thought. And this was the case with Dolores Davenant, when her father was taken from her.

The girl was by nature too sensible, by habit too truthful, by disposition too genuine, to make for herself a picture of her father's character—even when he was gone—of the saintly or even of the sentimental sort.

There was precious little of either in old Adrian Davenant, and his daughter, dutiful child though she had ever been, well knew it.

Dolly was aware that her father had been a hard and exacting man always—"of the earth, earthy"—that he delighted in calling himself, and in being called, a man of the world; and though she did not know all that the term implies in this day, nor the tenth of it, she knew enough of it to disperse every conventional filial illusion in his case.

On the other hand whatever might have been his faults—and she had long been forced to admit to herself the probability of their existence—it was undeniable that he had loved his son, with a narrow-minded selfish affection, though it was; and as Dare had always been the first object on earth with his sister, this love for him on his father's part in her eyes had a multitude of sins.

Now that Dare was gone, there was no self-reproach that she could feel, for there were no faults in him that she had ever perceived.

Lonely in the deepest and fullest sense of that

sad word she was. More than that, she felt alone—literally alone.

Had her brother rested by his father's side in Woodlawn, Dolly would have felt drawn to her old home and never dreamed again of leaving it. But even this small consolation was denied her.

To her the house which had been theirs, was henceforth that of the man whom she despised only less than she dreaded him, and of whom from the nameless horror with which he had inspired her, she had the direst misgiving.

So she looked upon the sunny coast on which she had been stranded, as an ark of refuge, and the quiet home which Captain Barnacle in his kindness had secured for her, as a sanctuary, safe and secure from the outside dangers that threatened her.

"Marm" Carraway was a widow in comfortable worldly circumstances, who looked well to the ways of her household. She was what many would call a strong-minded woman, but she was strong for the right at all times, and had a true and genuine sympathy for all who might be in trouble.

With her Dolly Davenant experienced a feeling of rest and security, and something akin to the calm cheerfulness which had been her marked characteristic, began to return to her.

It was a clear night, calm and cool, and though the evening had now far advanced, Dolly, for once, began to feel a strange nervousness, the precursor of a fit of insomnia, which only a walk on the beach could dispel.

There could be no danger in this, she felt, for it was almost as light as day, and not a living thing was visible as far as the eye could reach.

The everlasting boom of the sea came to her from the distant east as she spread her window open, but it had only a sweet, sad sound of invitation to her ears.

Within the embers dropped lazily through the polished bars of the grate, the lamp burned with a ghastly light and the shadows lay drear and dark about her or crept with a silent stealthiness up the dull paneling on the walls.

The chaste, white pallor of the winter moonlight quivered fitfully through the casement as she closed it, and set out on her walk to the beach.

At the same moment Vivian Fairfax, impelled by he knew not what, was pacing the white sands, pausing now and then to look out upon the blue waters. It had been seldom that he indulged in this. For the most since his arrival he had been waiting patiently for the man who did not come.

But to-night he had found it impossible to remain within doors. The shadows from the past fell upon him more darkly than they yet had done; and yet he would not, for worlds, make an effort to forget that past.

A mist seemed to come before his eyes when he thought in his solitude to-night of the fair sister who had been deceived and torn from the home and hearts of those who cherished her; and through it Vivian seemed to see her pale, anguished face, drifting further and further away from him.

The depth of a brother's earnest love stirred his inmost heart, and involuntarily he stretched out his arms, calling out the last words he had spoken to her.

"Don't be angry, Rosie—don't be angry with me. God knows I only mean to be to you what a brother ought to be. Forgive me if I seem harsh!"

She did not answer him then, and he had not seen her face or heard of her since that day.

No longer did he see her. The mist grew denser before his eyes, and another vision arose out of the gloom before him. Standing thus he looked upon another scene which his disordered fancy conjured up. He stood in a lonely land, far more desolate than the one in which he was now sojourning. It was a land flooded with yellow twilight. A grass-grown grave stood between two frowning cliffs. Dark trees waved their somber boughs above it, and on a cross at the head of that desolate-looking, forgotten mound of earth, was marked the name:

"ROSALIND."

A cry went up from the inmost soul of Vivian Fairfax, and the vision faded.

Another minute and he had darted from the house and was pacing rapidly up and down the sea-shore.

And, half a mile beyond the fair girl whom he had seen and admired but the day before sat again where he had first observed her, and strained her aching gaze out over the waste of waters.

"He sleeps there," she murmured; "and I still wake and keep the night watches. But is it wrong to wish him here, back from the rest, untimely though it came to him, that is his forever? Rest, Dare, rest in peace, and I will try to be as happy as you would have me be!"

Soft and low had these last words been spoken but they sounded over the sea, and a night-bird took them up, with a long, low, melancholy wail; and then, somewhere in the distance a bell struck the hour of ten.

Dolly Davenant started to her feet.

She paused for a moment as if to gather

strength, but it was only that she was reluctant to go. Soon a look of resolution came into the marble fairness of her face, the soft, sweet, sensitive lips quivered and then grew firm; she gave one glance toward the town, one parting look at the fringe of the receding wave, and then away—silently, swiftly she glided along the stretch of yellow sand, and then turned off among the dunes, in the direction of the roof that sheltered her.

A minute later a cry woke Vivian Fairfax from his dreaming. He looked, and a female form, but not the one he had fancied before him in his sad reverie, came rapidly toward him. It was Dolly Davenant, returning hurriedly along the path she had taken to reach her home among the sand-hills.

As Vivian turned to meet her he perceived two men, who, at sight of him, halted and then fled in another direction. They were evidently partly intoxicated, and had been heartlessly making the most of the alarm, their sudden appearance had given the unprotected maiden.

Vivian came nearer and raised his hat.

"Miss Davenant?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, in a natural manner.

Then she asked:

"How is it you know me?"

"I heard your name yesterday. You are staying with the Carraways. My name is Fairfax."

As he spoke he offered his arm.

Dolly took it without hesitation.

"I was alarmed," she exclaimed. "It was silly, perhaps, but I could not help it."

"I should think you had cause," said Vivian, as they turned again among the sand-dunes.

"Your home is here?" she asked.

"No; I have been here but a few days. I came from New York."

"From New York?"

"Yes; that is, from the State—not the city."

"Ah! New York was my home."

"Was? Is it so no longer?"

"I have no home now but this," she said, quietly.

"Do you really think of remaining here, Miss Davenant?" he asked.

"I have not thought of anything else since I came. And you, Mr. Fairfax?"

"I remain but a short time, I hope; that is, I expect—I am waiting for some one—expecting him daily."

"That is pleasant. I have nothing of that kind in prospect. No friends are likely to join me here. Indeed, I can hardly say that I have friends."

"It is not a friend I am waiting for," said the young man gloomily, almost savagely.

"Then, Mr. Fairfax, why wait for him? Had I an enemy, and I fear something of the kind, I would seek to avoid him."

"Not if he had injured you?"

"I think I would," said the girl.

"What, if the injury had been to one who was dear to you?"

"I would try to forget it."

"You would first have to forget the one you loved; and none of us I fancy would care to do that."

"Forget him!" The cry that came from Dolly Davenant was like that of a wounded bird.

"Forget Dare? Oh, no! never that! I may forget past pleasures and pains, but never him."

"Dare—who was Dare?"

Vivian Fairfax felt himself growing strangely, foolishly jealous of the man whom the beautiful and friendless girl seemed thus to hold as an object of worship. Before he could find speech again the lady had become calm once more.

"He was my brother, my all—there were only us two, and he was with me the other day," she explained.

"He is dead then—this Dare, your brother?"

"He died at sea."

"On your voyage hither? How sad."

"More so than you perhaps suppose. He was lost overboard on the very night that we sailed. I had retired, and supposed that he had done likewise, and in the morning it was found that he was not on board."

"And you have no other near relative?"

"None very near. A distant cousin came in possession of the bulk of our property on my brother's death."

"And he, this relative, Miss Davenant—where is he, may I ask?"

"In New York, I fancy. All his interests are there now; at least, I hope so," Dolly added, thinking of herself.

The tone in which this was said struck Vivian forcibly, and he at once remarked:

"Pardon me; but am I to infer that your cousin is not a favorite of yours?"

"I will tell you, Mr. Fairfax, stranger though you are; I fear the man without knowing why. My poor brother had, from the first, an unaccountable aversion to him, and my own dislike deepened into dread."

"And he knew that he was to profit by your brother's death?"

"Yes, but— Oh! Mr. Fairfax, you surely do not think—but no, he was not on board; he did not even know that we were coming away."

"I insinuate nothing," said Vivian.

By this time they had reached the gate. "I know nothing of the man, you see, Miss Davenport—not even his name." "His name," said Dolly, "is Endicott." "Endicott?" almost screamed the young man. "Not James Endicott?" "Yes, James Morse Endicott." "And you say he is in New York?" "I have every reason to suppose so." "I have every reason to suppose differently, Miss Davenport. *He is on his way here!*" "Here?" she exclaimed, "to Indianola?" "Precisely. I have ascertained it for a fact. He was in New Orleans but a week ago." "But why should he come here?" she cried, her heart full of terror as it was, answering her own question. "I never thought of his object, until now!" was the low reply of Vivian Fairfax.

CHAPTER XVI.

PRAIRIE PINK AS A DETECTIVE.

A LITTLE reflection convinced Butternut Ben, when he found that the man of whom he was in search was already in San Antonio, that it would not be best to come in his way for the present.

It was very doubtful if Endicott had observed him sufficiently on the couple of occasions on which they had met in New York to recognize him again, but in New Orleans he must have seen and noticed him, and should he now come up with him his suspicions might be excited. It would never do, therefore, for Endicott to be allowed to suspect that Ben was on his track. But the scout was never long at a loss what course to pursue when on a trail. Therefore on the following morning, when Endicott made his appearance on the Main Plaza it was not Butternut Ben but his pard who accosted him.

"Well, I be durned!" exclaimed Pink, in well affected astonishment; "who'd ever a-think o' meetin' you hyer-a-ways, colonel. How ther deuce come ye ter turn up hyer? Ther last I see'd o' yer war in Bunco Britts' in old York."

"By Jove!" said Endicott, trying for a moment or two to recall the figure before him, and then suddenly recollecting that he had seen some one like him in a resort of the character named "so it is, I declare! Really I'm glad to meet you. And so you belong in San Antonio?"

Endicott offered his hand graciously which the Texan took and shook vigorously.

"Right glad ter strike hyer boss," he said. "I sw'ar hit seems ter me like a slice of York itself, sot down in their middle o' ther ole Plaza!"

"And, I'm counfoundedly glad to see you," returned the other. "You see I hadn't been feeling quite up to par lately and thought a little run out this way would do me good. Fine climate this of yours."

"So folkses giner'ly says," was the reply. "Hit allers 'greed purty well with me. Hope you'll find hit salubrious, curnil; though durned ef I kin see signs of consumption 'bout yer, 'cept hit mought be of beef and whisky."

"Well, I'm not to say sick, you know, but I've been on rather too steep a racket, since I returned from the other side of the herring-pond a few months ago, and I feel the need of rest and a change."

"Jist so, boss, want ter take things kinder easy after a spell. Wa-al, that's right; some time durned ef I don't feel sorter sorry thet yer ain't up ter a leetle somethin' like life. We mought show yer a thing er two this-a-ways ef some of us ain't quite up ter civerlize; an' yer looks ter me like ther very pilgrim what would enjoy some 'citement o' ther right stamp."

"To be frank with you, my friend, I have a little game of my own on hand, and deuced glad I am to fall in with a chap like yourself who, if I mistake not, wouldn't mind taking a hand."

"Say, what's your name, pard?"

"Joe Pinkston air' my handle, Curnil Endicott, but ther gerloots hyer, an' on ther frontier giner'ly, spells hit Prairie Pink."

"Quite sentimental, by Jove! But how come you to know my name?"

"Heard it several times," said Pink; "an' I never loses my grip on a name er a face."

"A most invaluable faculty," was the reply. "I wish I was like you in that respect."

"But 'bout this hyer game o' yours, what yer was jist 'ludin' at. I ain't no great at poker, but I hes a pard that ain't no slouch. S'pose yer puts us up ter ther racket, fer we air 'bout dead broke."

"I'll promise to mend your fortunes for you, old boy, if you'll help me a little in this matter."

"I'm with yer, pard; but what's ther game?"

"Love and lucre, of course," said Endicott. "What other game is there, worth risking stamps on?"

"Love and eucher?" queried Pink, with a puzzled look.

"No—lucre!" explained Endicott, with a laugh, "wealth, you know—spondulicks!"

"Now I tumble! Why didn't you speak American at fust? But yer hes got ter post me in ther moves."

"I'll give you the dots, never fear. But we

must take it easy for the present, I fancy. I can't do anything till my ship comes in."

"Ship? whar—not in San Antone?"

"Hardly," laughed Endicott. "I should have said till I have heard that she is in—at Indianola."

"Pard, yer lays over me," said Pink, apparently mystified. "Give us another deal."

"Let us adjourn to the nearest saloon, then," suggested this new acquaintance, "and then we can talk it over quietly."

"Now, Pink," said Endicott, when they were seated comfortably and no one within hearing, "I will explain how matters are."

"You see, I came here overland, by the all-rail route so as to reach here ahead of certain parties who are coming by sea. I might have come on the packet, and possibly it would have been my best move to have done so; but the chances for winning the game in the long run seemed stronger this way, and so here I am."

"I see," replied the Texan.

He meant that he saw the New Yorker had arrived, not that he saw his hand, for Pink sat, looking the picture of patient mystification.

"I might as well say at once," resumed Endicott, "that a pretty girl and a pretty considerable fortune, in both of which I am interested, were on that voyage. The girl has, or had, rather, a brother—sick, or imagined he was—who stood between me and both. But somehow he didn't stand the voyage."

"Jist so," said Pink, looking as blank as before. "But I kinder 'magine'd yer said yer hadn't heard from ther packet. Or mebbe so yer only opines ther sick pilgrim passed in his chips on ther way out?"

"Never mind," was the somewhat confused reply. "I happen to know that the young man is no longer in the way and that is sufficient."

"Then thar ain't nothin' in ther way?"

"The fortune is all right—that is, the great bulk of it—the property falls to me on the death of the gentle youth I just spoke of. But the young lady herself is even more an object with me than the money."

"An' ther gal is in Injinoly?"

"Yes, or will be soon."

"Prezac'ly. An' yer think o' gwine thar?"

"Not much. Their intention was to come here, in the first place; and now that the young man is—well, no longer in the way—his sister will, I am quite certain, come on to San Antonio, for they had secured accommodations here for the winter. She will come beyond a doubt; even though it be her intention to return North immediately."

"Then hit 'pears to me, boss, yer air liarble ter hev it all yer own way," remarked Pink.

"I hope you may be right, my friend," replied Endicott; "but the truth is, the lady has the poor taste not to admire your humble servant."

"I think I sees yer more now, pard. Yer wants ter fotch ther gal ter terms."

"Something of that kind."

"Wal, yer hes ther wealth now yer says?"

"Yes, to all intents and purposes."

"An' ther gal air posted on that p'int?"

"By Jove, yes! I fancy she has waked up to the precise state of things by this time."

"Don't yer reckon then yer holds ther aces, pard?"

"Dash it! I am afraid not. Fact is, from what I know of the young lady, she's as proud as Lucifer's aunt. I stand a deuced sight worse show with her now than I did before."

"These yer 'kaliker-kivered humans air mighty curious truck," was the sage remark of the Texan. "Now, nat'rally, ther wealth yer speaks of order be yer strong suit. Hit would be with nigh all ther female women I air 'quainted with."

"There are exceptions to all rules, my friend; and if I know anything of the case under consideration, the prejudice I spoke of, on the young lady's side, will be rather heightened by this sudden accession of mine to fortune. But I think I see my way."

"Thar's money in it yer say, boss?"

"For you, yes! I have made my pile out of it already. What I want now is the girl; and I will make it worth the while of any one who will help me to secure her. But it must be done in a way that will make her look on me as her pre-serv'er."

"That's yer card, eh?"

"The only one that can take a trick in this game, depend upon it," said Endicott. "I have calculated every move, and I know."

"Yer looks fer her this-a-way soon, yer says? When did ther packet sail from New York?"

"On the morning of the eighteenth," was the reply.

"Then I opinions she's bin in Injinoly for some time. D'ye reckon ther gal air thar till yit?"

"She is there if nothing has happened, or else she is now on her way to San Antonio. It is my anxiety in regard to her safety and welfare, having heard, while in New Orleans, that her brother had been lost at sea, that has brought me here."

"I am the young lady's nearest living relative, besides being her father's heir. What more natural, and at the same time more

thoughtful, than that I should hasten hither to see that she is not exposed to any dangers or annoyances in her sad and unprotected condition?"

"I savey," said Pink. And then he added, admiringly, "Waal, I'll be durned!"

"I fancy I have struck the right vein," continued Endicott; "but as dangers and that sort of thing exist principally in the imagination of women and tenderfeet, I have come to the conclusion that my best play is to create something of the kind. Do you tumble?"

Prairie Pink looked the very personification of unsuspecting innocence.

James Endicott went on revealing his plot more fully to his companion, who sat drinking it all in.

The unprincipled schemer felt that he had fallen in with the very man of all others who could arrange and carry out the plan he had in his mind.

The acquaintances he had formed up to this time, since his arrival in San Antonio—such fellows, for example, as Monte Max—were none of them of the caliber to engage in the kind of work that he contemplated. As to the boys in buckskin, whom he had now and then seen around the Menger and other hostleries, his knowledge of human nature told him at a glance that it would not be healthy to approach any of the proposals that he had to make.

But here was one who seemed to fall readily into his scheme, who, in fact, met him half way. With all the insight, however, that James Endicott had into the character of his fellow-men, and with the great deal more that he fancied he had, he was completely deceived in the man before him. No one ever played the part of a detective more successfully.

Prairie Pink had gained his knowledge of his kind partly by long experience in the ways of the divers sorts and conditions of men that are to be met with in border life; partly, strange to say, of a man like him, by imagination, which enabled him to put himself into their exact circumstances, and partly by a keen sensitiveness of feeling, which was hidden under his stolid mask of indifference.

He would have known anywhere, and no matter how he had met him, that he could have nothing in common with a man of the stripe of James Endicott.

From all that Butternut Ben had told him he had been ready to hear of a plot against some young man who was now on his way to Texas, if not already there. In a brief interview he now learned that the individual in question was already dead—had met, he could not doubt it, with foul play—and that his sister now daily looked for in San Antonio was to be the victim of the wretch who stood confessed of complicity in his taking off.

"I've struck a mint of low-lived, murderin' whelps since I hes bin on ther trail," Pink muttered to himself as he left the presence of his would-be employer, with a promise to bring a pard of his that night to the "Three Brothers" to receive the final instructions from Endicott.

"I has seen a heap in my time, but of all the condemned cowardly cusses I ever run in on, this hyer sweet-scented night-blooming serius takes ther rag offen ther chaparral, durned ef he don't!"

"He's a nice one ter 'pear suddenly in ther kerracter o' ther gal's persarver, ther dog-goned no 'count cowardly cut-throat! I kinder mistrusted thet Pard Ben mought be a little mistook in opinin' thet ther sneakin' kiote war plottin' ag'in' ther young man on ther packet, but, durned ef he see'd half-way through ther ladder what ther cuss put up."

"Ther young pilgrim didn't never git away from York, hit 'pears now; an' bow he come ter his eend, Lord above knows. Ther gal must be now somewhar Injinoly ways; but whar in thunder ar Texas Thad?"

"Dog'd ef he warn't a nice posey for Ben ter put on board thet packet ter watch fer squalls. But mebbe so, Thad went up same time es ther young tenderfoot; hit seems ther onliest way ter 'count fer his not comin' ter time. He can't be hangin' out in Injinoly till yit, lessen he's 'tendin' ter fotch ther piece o' kaliker through ther San Antone an' air waitin' till she gits ready."

"I must see what Butternut Ben kin 'splainify on thet p'int, though dog'd ef I don't s'prise him inter ther middle o' nex' week with ther Sociated Press dispatches what I got outen this cuss Endicott, an' hedn't ter pay fer them, nor ter pump him neither!" and Prairie Pink became lost in deepest reverie.

CHAPTER XVII.

FLEEING FROM THE FOE.

THE declaration of the stranger Vivian Fairfax that James Endicott, the man whom she so loathed and feared, was daily expected by him in Indianola, was to Dolly Davenport confirmation of her worst fears.

In some way, it was evident, this man who seemed thus bent on persecuting her, had learned of their destination after leaving New York, and was following them.

He might even have heard before starting—there had been ample time for him to have done

so—that Dare had not arrived with his sister in Indianola, and that the latter was alone.

The nameless dread that she had of him, from the time she had first met him, had not been without foundation. It had not sufficed him to inherit her father's estate; he must follow it up by being the terror and curse of her lonely life.

She must leave her quiet retreat at once. Secretly, and as a thief she would go, without a word to any of her destination. But how could she do this? How could she alone and unprotected as she was, thus set out for San Antonio?

There was no one to whom Dolly could apply for advice. Captain Barnacle had sailed in the North Star the day before, and the quaint old Texan whose sympathy had been so grateful to her on the voyage, had disappeared on the very day of their arrival, and his whereabouts was unknown to her.

True, there was this stranger whom she had just met. He was beyond a doubt a gentleman, and she had been most favorably impressed by him. But he might be—he probably was—a friend to Endicott. He had spoken, indeed, as if he was waiting in Indianola for the arrival of the latter; so she dare not think of taking him into her confidence.

Thus in agitation and uncertainty, the night passed. But the daylight was at hand.

Early morning found Dolly Davenant again pacing the beach and watching with no little interest the movements of a party who seemed to be collecting their valuables, having recently landed, and to be preparing for a start of some kind into the interior.

As she stopped, hesitating whether to approach them and ascertain the end and object of their journey, she started in alarm at the sound of a firm tread close behind her.

Her terror since the night before, had been almost a part of herself. Every shadow had been almost a part of herself. Every shadow that fell before her was to her the forerunner of the man she so much dreaded.

"Mornin', Miss Davenant," said a voice that had a strangely familiar sound; "hit's a sight for sore eyes ter git a peep at yer ag'in."

She turned, her delight at finding her apprehensions had been groundless, making her marvelous beauty more striking than it had ever appeared to the man who accosted her.

"Oh, Mr. Bronson!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad to see you again!"

And Dolly held out both her hands.

"Call me Thad, miss—Texas Thad," said her friend of the storm. "Ther t'other handle don't seem ter fit somehow, even in civerlize. Same time, hits mighty good o' yer ter 'member what 'tis."

"I never forget those who have been kind to me," she said warmly.

"I knowed that, 'fore yer told me," rejoined the Texan; "but thet thar kinder mem'ry air gittin' scarce 'pears ter me. One don't find hit layin' 'roun' much permisc'us. How has yer bin?"

"I have been quite well," Dolly replied. "Very well, perhaps I ought to say. And you?"

"Tain't wo'th while ever ter ax 'bout me, 'ceptin' hit's fer form's sake. I'm equal ter my three squar' meals a day, an' takes me see-esters regular."

"Have you been here ever since we arrived?"

"Nary time, miss. Bin over Matty Gordy ways. Jist waitin' fer a show ter bitch onter some pilgrims travelin' West. I reckoned yer might be here, mebbe till yit."

"Yes, I had no thought of leaving until lately."

"Stoppin' at Marm Garraway's?"

Dolly replied in the affirmative. Here, she thought, may be my opportunity to leave—to get away from the prospect, the certainty of meeting that man, a sight of whom would be now simply horrible.

As she hesitated Texas Thad again spoke.

"Thinkin' o' makin' some kinder move, I reckon from what yer said jist now. Don't find things quite ter suit yer, mebbe so, at Marm Carraway's?"

"It is very nice there indeed," she hastened to say; "and Mrs. Carraway is exceedingly kind. But you know I think I told you once that we were intending to go to San Antonio—my poor brother and I—and I have begun to feel recently as if I would like to do as he proposed."

"I am afraid I am getting restless, and do not know when I am well off."

"San Antone air well worth a visit," remarked Thad. "I hails from thet-a-way, when hit seems ther thing ter hev a locate ter fall back on. How soon mought yer be thinkin' o' makin' a start?"

"Oh! at once," she said hastily; feeling that the chance she so longed for might be at hand.

"Not in thet rig, I don't reckon, Miss Davenant. No more I don't much think yer calkulates ter huff it. Who yer gwine with?"

"I don't know," Dolly answered. "I have been greatly worried what to do. I want so much to leave here without delay, and I do not see my way clear about setting out. It is so far and the journey is a fatiguing, if not a dangerous one."

"Slightly," said the Texan; "an' I opines not a great many young ladies would keer ter try an' make ther raffle erlone."

"That, of course, I have never thought of, Mr. Bronson."

"An' yer wouldn't be lieble ter kerry hit out ef yer hed. But hit happens ther' hain't no needcessity fer sich risky doin's."

"Yer sees thet lay-out over thar?" pointing as he spoke to the mule-train, which had caught Dolly's attention a few minutes before.

The young lady assented.

"Wa-al," said Texas Thad; "them thar pilgrims air 'bout startin' this arternoon, headin' San Antonio ways."

"Thar's three female women in ther outfit already, ole Marm Bilberry an' her two darters, an' I opines they'd be right glad ter hev you go in cahoot wi' them fer ther trip."

"I kin 'range hit fer yer, jist es easy; thet air, ef yer thinks yer kin change yer kaliker, an' git yer belongings ship-shape in time."

"Oh, thank you so much!" exclaimed Dolly eagerly. "You are so kind. It is just what I could have wished above everything. I can be ready in an hour or two. How fortunate I have been in meeting you again!"

"Hit has kinder 'peared to me, Miss Davenant," said the old man, "that yer luck mought be on t'other side. I war thinkin' when I fu'st sot my peepers onter yer jist now, hit war ther best sign in ther way o' good luck I keered ter hev 'fore startin'; an' then I hedn't no idee yer war thinkin' o' pullin' up stakes an' j'inin' the band."

"You too?" she cried. "Are you going?"

"Somethin' o' thet kind, I reckon. Yer see I hes been layin' 'roun' waitin' fer a show o' this kind, an' when these pilgrims wanted ter hire somebody 'bout my size an' 'sperience, I tumbled et one't."

"Yer don't feel like backin' out on that account, I hopes," he added.

Dolly's face was positively bright with the joy of knowing that the brave scout, who she had felt instinctively from the first was true and kind, and above suspicion, was to be her guide and protector in this, her flight from the evil to come.

Texas Thad noticed the expression on the face of the young girl and felt flattered.

He smiled grimly, as he asked again:

"Does yer mind ter start on ther trail San Antone ways still, arter hearin' what I let out onintentional?"

"You know how I feel about that," she replied.

"Wa-al, yer kin be es spry as yer please 'bout gittin' ready. I don't allow I ken help yer much et thet; but yer mought gi'n me pious regards ter Marm Carraway an' hint thet, jist fer ole 'quaintance sake, she mought make herself useful 'bout now, seein' es she ain't highly ornamental no more."

"You are only too kind," said Dolly. "If you will add to what you have already done, and for which I feel so grateful, may I ask that you make the necessary business arrangements for me with your friends on the train?"

"Who, Major Bilberry? I reckon thar won't be much 'rangements in ther case. But I'm gwine ter see ther lay-out right off. Ole Ma'm Bilberry an' ther gals will be tickled ter death a'most et ther prospect o' hev'in' yer 'long with them."

"Yer see, Miss Davenant, thar ain't no young bucks erlong, for the hot-headed brats of ole man Bilberry's won't be legal tender fer a cat's age yit—an' whar thar ain't no beaux, ther gals is allers glad ter hev shemale company."

The lonely girl was quite overcome at the prospect thus suddenly opened before her of making an immediate start on the journey which she so desired, and yet had so dreaded to make.

And yet she reproached herself for giving way to the dread that so oppressed her.

She had found this such a quiet haven after the storm through which she had passed. Could she hope to find anything like the same repose in the place for which she was so eager to set out?

It were almost madness to dream of it. Still she must go. How indeed could she think of remaining?

She began at once her preparations for departure. In a few hours more she would be on her way to San Antonio—the spot in which she and Dare had dreamed of whiling away the shining hours together.

And she was severing the one link that in some way seemed to bind her to all that had been bright and happy in the past.

She was leaving the sea, the beautiful, the ever-changing sea. Somehow she had never been able to regard it as the cruel monster that had swallowed up the last stay that she had clung to—the grave that had engulfed poor Dare in the very moment of his highest hopes for the future.

But she felt, as many do in such cases, that amid new scenes, new and engrossing duties might arise. In work she might forget her sorrows, and begin life anew. She felt a hunger at her heart, not so much for human love and sympathy, but to be up and doing. The luxury of

grief was one that she dared not longer indulge in.

She would no longer think of her bereavement.

Henceforward not death but life, and how to make her way through it, were to furnish food for her thoughts. Fashion and splendor had never been welcome to her; the very thought of them was now hateful.

Long before the evening had come, Dolly having completed her packing and said her farewells to her kind hostess and family, who were grieved at this sudden determination of hers to leave them, was watching out for the arrival of Texas Thad, who was to escort her to the wagon-train and give her an introduction to those who were to be the companions of her journey.

"Ole man Bilberry 'pears ter be rather a comical cuss, from what I hes seed' of him," remarked Thad, as they were walking together toward the train, by way of preparing Dolly for her new acquaintances.

"Ther ole 'oman, hit's easy ter see, air rather slacktwisted; an' the gals—dog'd ef they wouldn't puzzle ole Orderbones hisself ter classerfy them."

"Thar's one conserlation; ther trip ain't gwine ter be a everlastin' long one, so yer won't hev ter make frien's outen them, ef yer wanted ter ever so much."

"Time, I have found," said the young lady, "has very little to do with making friends."

"But hit hes right smart ter do, Miss Davenant, with tryin' them. I hes lived ter mighty small purpos' in most respects, but I hes learnt thet much neverstandin'."

"And that makes you suspicious of people," Dolly suggested.

"I 'low I air of folkses in gin'ral; but now an' ag'in one comes acrost a case like present company, what cl'ar upsots the rule?"

"You're quite a courtier, Mr. Bronson."

"Hit's right smart of a time since I did any courtin'," said the old man. "Ef hit warn't too late ter begin ag'in, I doesn't know es I c'u'd resist ther temptation. But hyer's ther outfit. They is on ther lookout fer we-'uns, apperiently. Dog'd ef thet biggest she Bilberry hain't fixed herself up like a Star-Spangled Banner. I hain't seed' sich a circus since las' Mardigray in New Orleans."

The introductions were gone through with by Texas Thad in due form, and soon Dolly was comfortably seated in the wagon under the protecting wing of Marm Bilberry. An hour later the train was moving slowly in the direction of San Antonio.

Two hours later Vivian Fairfax, feeling that he was privileged to call and make polite inquiries after the health of the young lady who had parted from him so abruptly the night before, was met at the door by Marm Carraway, who informed him in a tone of voice that sufficiently expressed her sorrow that Miss Davenant had gone.

Dolly had indeed gone—started direct, unwillingly for the snare of the fowler, and Vivian Fairfax was at a loss to understand her sudden departure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

WHEN Dare Davenant fell stunned but not killed, beneath the blow of the assassin and was flung into the dark and seething waters alongside, he had not, as the conspirators supposed sunk to the bottom.

The work the two villains felt satisfied had been done, and well done; and so they hastened to assure their employer. The latter as we know was fully assured of the fact, having resolved that he would not trust to the word of either of the ruffians in a matter of so much importance to himself.

So when the two assassins reached the hotel at which James Endicott was putting up they found that murderous gentleman in his apartment; but they little suspected that he had reached the hotel only a few minutes in advance of them. They were duly paid as had been agreed upon for the bloody service they had performed; and having dismissed them, which he was glad enough to do, Endicott was ready to set out on the morrow for the Crescent City, intending to remain there until the startling news should reach him, of the death of Dare Davenant, and of the inheritance that awaited him.

But, Dare Davenant was not yet dead.

He had fallen, not wholly into the water but upon what proved to be a small raft, an old hatchway, which had been thrown from the pier, and which the storm had driven back to the dock. There, in an unconscious condition, he was picked up soon after, the argus eye of a watchman having observed something unusual in the water, and an ambulance being summoned; he was at once removed to the nearest hospital.

Now, it so happens, that even at such a late hour the course of a hospital ambulance through the streets of New York does not always run smooth, and along with those which were halted on this occasion to let the vehicle pass were several carriages, one of which was that of the newly risen "Star" in the theatrical world,

who had that very evening begun her engagement in Gotham.

The delay was sufficiently long to admit of the inquiries of Miss St. Evremont in regard to the unfortunate person in the ambulance being answered, and the next day saw that lady at the hospital on an errand of mercy to find out about the unknown victim of some man's crime.

The patient she was told was still unconscious. Nothing had been yet ascertained in regard to him and no papers that could give a clue to his identity had been found upon him. He had evidently been going on a journey, or had just returned, as he was in traveling costume; and his appearance indicated that he belonged to the cultivated and wealthy class.

His injuries the surgeons said, were not necessarily fatal. The only apprehension they had was in regard to his brain.

Miss St. Evremont sent regularly to inquire after the case, in which she felt quite an interest; and many besides her were curious to know who the young gentleman could be whose absence from his own circle had caused no inquiries to be made, no advertisement to appear in any of the papers that had reference to one missing of which he answered the description.

Thus it was that all who felt an interest in him waited with no little anxiety for his return to reason. But though reason came back in a little time, memory did not return with it.

Rational on all other subjects, on this the patient was completely at sea. In vain, he struggled with himself, seeking to catch some note from the past which would bring to his ear and his brain the song of other days. In vain those who read and talked with him, sought to furnish him with a key to the past. There was nothing apparently upon which memory could lay hold, that would guide it to the only knowledge that could benefit him.

Could he but catch one reflection, even the faintest, from the light that had once shone upon him it would, so thought a skillful specialist who visited him, suffice to bring back to his mind all that he had lost.

It was strange the interest he took in all that was read to him from the daily papers. He appeared to care for naught besides. They could not see, those around him, that he was searching painfully among them for some tidings of himself—of the self that he had lost.

So the time passed. And every day that dawned saw Rose St. Evremont, the dramatic star, the idol of the hour that she was, by the side of the unknown young man in the hospital—the young man who was unknown to himself. The little time that the popular actress could spare from the duties of her profession she freely gave to him who so much needed the brightness and the sympathy that she never failed to bring with her.

Miss St. Evremont had resolved, if it were possible, that she would in some way strike the chord of memory in the patient, which, she felt convinced was not unstrung, only they had each and all failed to find it. So she patiently tried and hoped for this end. Little wonder was it, therefore, that the beautiful and gifted woman became, without suspecting, far less intending it, to the youthful convalescent, what the sun is to the flowers, and dew to the parched earth. He looked longingly for her coming, even more than he did for the return of recollection he had so strangely lost. He had no past that he could distinctly recall. The beauty which had been, in some vague way, about him in his past life, was now concentrated in the person of this angelic vision—this fair-haired, gentle-voiced woman of the world, with her soft and shapely hands and her calm pure eyes, in whose presence alone did his life seem more than mere vegetation.

Rose St. Evremont was clearly not prepared for what was soon to come.

It was a cold, damp, drizzly day in the great metropolis—a day only fit for fires, thick wraps and fascinating books, and yet Miss St. Evremont was out in it all. As she stepped into her carriage she saw, amid the whirling snowflakes a pale sickly sun now and then peeping out, and popping in again, only to give promise of brightness one minute and contradict itself the next.

The coupe whirled up to the hospital amid a shower of sleet and a blast of wind, and the beautiful woman was handed out, and went in on her mission.

A hum of welcome and admiration from the nurses and attendants in the corridors greeted her as she passed along. She seemed to have received a fresh baptism of beauty, she looked so calm, so contented, as she glided along on her errand of mercy. It was the soft, sweet innocent loveliness that Raphael gives to his Madonna, a delicate, spiritual, flower-like face which ever wears the best and fascinates the longest, for it has little that is earthly about it.

There were prettier women in the world than Rose St. Evremont, but there were few who had the same charm of manner and presence. There was this nameless something, and it is well understood in society to be worth cultivating, but unhappily models of that kind are not over plentiful. The gushing, the languishing, the fast, among the sea, have their specimens and

their imitators on all sides; but the girl or woman who ventures to be natural is rarely to be met with.

Rose St. Evremont had this rare courage—rare indeed in her profession—and to those who could read nature it was simply irresistible.

The young man had been as usual longing for the daily visit that she paid him. He had never for a moment ceased his mental straining after his lost identity; but without striving for it, he had discovered instead his second, his better self.

But it only increased his anxiety to know who he really was—who he had been, as he was wont to put it—that he might know if he were in any way worthy of her.

"You have been able to discover nothing yet," said the lady, as she seated herself. "I can see that; for the anxious look has not vanished yet."

"I am more anxious than ever," he replied.

"Very naturally," she rejoined; "and yet though it can be little comfort to one in your position, there are worse things in the world than not knowing to whom we belong."

"I can scarce imagine them," said the young man.

"There are such things as knowing and dreading," she explained; "knowing those who have, in the world's eyes at least, claims upon us, but whom we would not return to, whom we would not meet, for any consideration on earth."

"You have known such cases, then?" he said.

"I am such a case myself," said Miss St. Evremont. "I am utterly alone in the world."

The tone of voice in which this was spoken roused the courage which a moment before would have seemed to him worse than madness.

"Why should you be alone? Why should you, of all women, be without a stay, a support, a worshiper, some one that you can lean upon and trust in?"

"Trust?" she said, and she smiled bitterly.

"Have you then confidence in no one?" he asked.

"Why should I?" she demanded, rather sharply for her. "Who is there whom I could trust?"

"Trust me!" he exclaimed, with vehemence. "You say you will claim no one. There are none who will claim me. Let us belong to each other."

The absurdity of the proposal could not fail to strike the woman he addressed; but not for worlds would she have shown him that such was her view of it. Instead, she looked at him sadly.

"My poor friend," she replied, "you cannot know what it is that you are saying."

"I know well enough, Miss St. Evremont, only as is very natural, you cannot give me credit for knowing it. I am awkward, I know, in expressing what I feel, for I have lost much of the grace of speech and manner that I once had."

"But you can make allowance for that. Let me say it then, in plain language—Rose, I love you—I want you to be my wife."

Miss St. Evremont was strangely conscious of a wild throb of the heart; a feeling of which a moment before she would not have believed herself capable.

"All this is impossible," she said, as firmly but as kindly as it could be said. "I know it is so, and you ought to know it."

"Is it," he demanded, "because I am so painfully situated, because I am a man without a name?"

"I ought scarcely to make that an objection," she answered, with a sad smile, "since the name that I bear is not my own, and the only one to which I am entitled I refused to be known by."

"All that," was the reply, "could have no influence with me in any way."

"Possibly not," said the lady, "but there is more I must tell you; for strange and wild though such an idea of marriage between us really is, I respect and esteem you too highly not to receive the compliment you have paid me, as it was intended."

"You will think of it, then?" he pleaded, with a hungry look in his face.

"It needs it not. It can never be thought of. I am not Miss St. Evremont. I am a wife!"

The young man sunk back upon a couch.

"A wife!" he cried. "Whose wife?"

"That cannot matter," she returned, sorrowfully. "I care not even to have my marriage known, and therefore I seek not to have it dissolved."

"But let us change the subject," she said, "since it is one that cannot be discussed. Let us talk of something that is of importance to you."

"You read the papers. Have you seen nothing that you recognize?"

"Nothing," he answered, almost indifferently.

Miss St. Evremont took up a newspaper from the table near her. Her eyes had scarce rested an instant upon the page, when a change came over the placid, perfect face—a change that was noticed at once by the young man whose chief study it was.

"You are startled," he cried. "What is it that you have seen?"

"His name, that is all; my husband's!"

The firm, chiseled lips had a more determined look, as after a minute's silence the lady again spoke.

"I must stop this," she said. "I had feared it—known it; but I knew not who it was that he sought to injure. He is rich now, it appears, and he seeks with his riches a wife—a wife, and I his—ay, and will be his unto death!"

"Will you read what has moved you so?" he asked.

She paused a moment and then read:

"We see by the New Orleans papers that James M. Endicott, Esq., who came into possession of the Davenant estate, on the sudden demise of young Dare Davenant, who was lost overboard from the Texas packet North Star, has left the Crescent City to join Miss Davenant, who is a distant relative of his, in San Antonio."

She had barely finished when the young man, the unknown, sprung toward her, and clutched at the paper that she held, the look of an insane man in his eyes. With a look such as few but Rose St. Evremont could give, she restrained him, and he resumed his seat, trembling as though he was seized with the ague.

"The name," he said, presently—"the man who was lost overboard. I was that man! The name?"

"You? What do you mean? The man who was lost at sea was Dare Davenant!"

"And I was lost overboard. I know it all now. I am Dare Davenant!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BILBERRIES.

THE opinion which Texas Thad had so freely expressed to Miss Davenant, regarding the interesting family whom he had undertaken to guide across country to San Antonio, somewhat prepared that young lady for what she had to meet. But it must be confessed nothing in her former experience of her own sex, quite tallied with the specimens here presented to her.

The head of the family, and, in this case, "the gray mare was anything but the better horse of the two," was a man, taciturn as an Indian, self-opinionated as a Dutchman and ignorant as an orang-outang, but nevertheless an honest, well-meaning old fellow, who received Dolly as kindly as he knew how, and was at heart really glad of this addition to his party.

Old Man Bilberry—"Major," as he dearly loved to be designated—was a very fitting representative of a class to be met with almost anywhere in the "piney" regions of the sunny South.

A notion of, in some indefinite way, bettering his condition had entered his cranium a year or two before, and had been slowly working there until quite recently. The result of the mountain's labor was to bring forth the Texas trip, on which we now find him, with his family.

"Old Marm Bilberry," with fearful visions of hostile Indians floating where her brains might have been, opposed the project with her whole soul. But this only added fuel to the slow fire—slow, but sure—which had been burning unseen and unheard for so long. It was enough for Major Bilberry, at any time, to know that any one, and more especially the wife of his bosom, antagonized any plan of his, to decide upon carrying it through to the bitter end. As he expressed it, he was "running this shet ang, and he reckoned he was the sponable party."

Small comfort this, so thought Marm Bilberry, if "she and her darters lost their scalps through the durn ole fool's cursed contrariness."

The boys—the "brats," their excellent paternal ancestor called them—welcomed the change. It was a change for them, at least, so it promised to be, and life in the pine woods was beginning to be a trifle monotonous even for them. Boys will be boys, and Major Bilberry's "brats," born and raised in the woods though they had been, could scarce be expected to prove exceptional cases.

Buck, the elder of the two—his "frnt" name was said to have been William, but that was merely traditional—was now sixteen, "tow-headed," as Texas Thad had described him, and with no very extended ideas of the world, or the possible part he might have to play in it.

Bud, the second male scion of the Bilberry tree, had been threatened with the name of Washington Bilberry in his adolescence; but it had evidently ended with the threat, and, like his brother, his present alliterative appellation seemed to suit him, and was found to be a more convenient handle than the one borrowed from the Father of his Country.

Bud was smaller, thinner, more sallow-faced and, if anything, more tow-headed than the heir apparent of the house of Bilberry. Unfortunately for him, he had now passed the age when he could be petted to any advantage, and all his assumptions of manhood were effectually squelched by the more powerful Buck, so that there was no niche at hand in which the rising youth could be fitted.

The only other male of the party was, legally, "a man and a brother." His color was that of an old shoe, his age about thirty, and his cognomen "Cudge." He was said to have formed

in his early youth a very important part of the goods and chattels of Major Bilberry's father. However that may have been, Cudge had never known any other place in life than that of an adjunct, a kind of factotum to the Bilberry family. He was now proving his devotion to them, in the only way in his power. He had no father or mother, to speak of, or doubtless he would have been willing to have forsaken them; but he was, or had been, supposed to be married, and he now evinced a readiness to desert the wife of his bosom and join "Mars' Maje" and "Miss Caline," and "de chillins," in their journey to the Canaan northwest of the Gulf of Mexico.

Major Bilberry had been unwilling at first to accept this willing sacrifice, but his scruples vanished when Cudge coolly repudiated the marriage tie, alleging that they had only "tuck up," and as the lady in question offered no opposition, that matter was easily settled.

The daughters of the house rejoiced in the names of Nancy Ann Jane, and Betsy Rebecca, respectively, and were both somewhat inclined to the intense type of femininity.

They both welcomed Miss Davenant, as Thad had predicted, feeling that they had nothing to lose and might have something to learn.

"Whar mought you ha' bin raised?" drawled out Marm Bilberry, soon after they had started.

"In New York," Dolly replied.

"Bless gracious!" exclaimed the old lady. "I hain't seen nary soul from thar, thet I minds on, in all my borned days."

"Yes ye has, too," suggested her first-born.

"Who was they, Nancy Ann Jane?"

"Yankees," was the young lady's answer.

"Massy to me! I warn't thinkin' o' them."

"Yer ever bin ter Alerbam?" questioned Miss Betsy Bilberry.

"Never," was the reply.

Both the young ladies looked triumphant at this. They had been somewhere of which this stylish-looking stranger knew nothing.

"We-uns hes lived thar all our lives," said Nancy Ann Jane proudly.

Dolly tried to look as if surprised at this.

"I didn't want ter leave," said the old lady; "an' I stood out ag'in' it jest es long es I could, but I didn't git no great backin', so I gi'n away."

"I reckoned hit's like ter be right pleasant," said Betsy. "Alerbam ain't so slow, but Texas'll be a change. Heaps o' y'ung men gwine thar lately," she added, innocently.

"Thet's about all ye're thinkin' on, gal," put in her mother with an air of reproof. "An' yer hain't but risin' eighteen, nother."

"I wonder how much older you was when you tuck ter bevin' beaux?" was the dutiful rejoinder of the young lady.

"None o' yer bizness!" was the reply.

"I'm past nineteen," said Nancy Ann Jane.

"How old are you Miss Davenant?"

"I am twenty," replied that young lady.

"Hed any beaux yit?" inquired Betsy.

"Not any," was the amused response.

"Great Peter!" the girl exclaimed.

"No more you never hedn't," said her elder sister.

"Well, I hain't nowhar nigh so old; an' 'sides you needn't crow. You never hadn't none yer-self, lessen hit was Jeemse Spooks."

"I hed two. Thar was Joe Jarnigan."

"He didn't count. He had a wife a'ready. Hadn't he maw?"

"Oh, you gals dry up! Ye drives me plum crazy, 'long o' yer gab."

Dolly was relieved to find that the young ladies acted on their mother's suggestion, and began to give their attention to the cut and fit of her traveling dress.

When they halted for the night, Marm Bilberry, having now an addition to her audience, began to ventilate her grievances in having to leave her "right rich home in the piney woods of Alerbam." She had no great opinion of the merits of Texas, as a field for immigration, and she vowed she would be a disappointed woman if by any chance it turned out different.

"I never did have my way in nothin'," she whined, as she settled herself after supper.

"Wa-al, 'twan't 'kase yer didn't try heard enough," replied her husband.

"I allers was plum ag'in' this hyer undertakin': an' I don't feel no diff'rint hit yit."

"Nater'ly," said the major. "I believe in my soul ye'd 'pose my gwine to Heaven!"

"I hain't see'd yer started thet-a-way yit," was the rather sarcastic reply. "But heaven's one thing an' Texas air another, an' 'sides thar's ther Injuns."

"Thar's yer granny!" exclaimed Old Man Bilberry with stolid contempt.

"Wa-al wait till yer q'aters is captivated."

"Oh, maw!" screamed one of the young ladies.

"Do fer massy's sake git them dratted Injuns outen yer head. Hit's right down frightsome."

"Let her keep 'em thar, gals," advised their father. "Long as they ain't nowhere else, our har's safe. I reckon."

"Yer hain't got much ter lose," grumbled his wife.

"All ther better," said the philosophic major; "they won't make much outen me then."

"Say, Mister Thad," put in Buck Bilberry, "ye reckon ther Injuns is anywhar clost'?"

"Not anywhar this side o' two hundred mile."

The young man tried hard to look discouraged, for his intention had been to distinguish himself in taking scalps; but the effect was quite the opposite on the female members of the party.

Still it must be confessed that Marm Bilberry rather regretted that the opinion had been so confidently expressed in the hearing of her husband; for it had been no small comfort to the good lady, ever since leaving Alerbam, to predict scalping and torturing for all hands, and she had not been without the hope that the major would come in time to believe it, though she was very far from having these apprehensions herself.

"Does yer 'spect to settle down in San Antone fer good, Miss Davenant?" asked Bud.

"I have not decided," she replied. "My intention has been to spend the winter there."

"I don't reckon Buck'll keer ter go no furdur," the youth remarked, significantly.

His sisters giggled at this while Buck rewarded his wit with a vigorous kick.

Dolly began to have premonitions that she would not make intimate friends of any of her new acquaintances; but they were amusing in their way, and she wisely resolved to take what enjoyment she could out of the party.

The scene though in no way remarkably picturesque was to Dolly a novel one, and she sat upright for some time and watched it with a sense of pleasure, that one would hardly have expected from a young lady situated as she was. In the dim light of the camp fire she could see the tall, commanding form of the Alabama major, his hands plunged in his pockets, pacing back and forth in meditation, which, though it might not be entirely pleasant, was certainly not gloomy.

His excellent spouse finding that all her grumbling was as so many blank cartridges, and probably feeling the need of rest, had already sunk into repose.

The two sweet sisters had dropped their strident voices into a low monotone, broken at intervals by the inevitable giggle; but Dolly was neither interested or annoyed by it.

Buck and Bud were quarreling in a brotherly way, and the young lady was not without a suspicion that she was herself the innocent cause of this unnatural strife.

Cudge, the faithful colored adherent of the fortunes and misfortunes of the master's house, was interviewing Texas Thad, in a very earnest way; probably with reference to his chances of securing, when they should reach their destination, a substitute for the sable charmer he had so informally divorced before leaving.

As soon as Dolly's old friend was released he came up to where she was seated. The young lady welcomed his appearance, as she had been unable to have any conversation with him since they had set out.

"I enjoy this so much," she said, as she invited him to be seated near her.

"Then yer ain't noways sorry that yer tuck my advice 'bout travelin' 'longer this hyer outfit seein' yer had 'cided ter try an' make ther rifle some way?"

"No, indeed, my friend; it is all, thanks to you, ever so much nicer and pleasanter than I expected. I can never be half grateful enough for all your kindness."

"Now come, Miss Davenant, just let up on that, it makes me feel small somehow. But, say, yer don't mind ther cacklin' o' ther ole hen an' ther pullets, does ye?"

"Not in the least. I rather like it."

"Nor ther crowin' o' ther young roosters? 'Kase ef yer does, dog'd ef I don't wring ther durned necks!"

Dolly laughed softly at the old man's indignation.

"You have no idea how it amuses me," she said, reassuringly.

"Then hit's all right, I reckon, till we gits ter San Antone."

"I hope so, indeed. You think we are not in any kind of danger?"

"Don't know whar hit c'u'd come from," said Thad. "Thar hain't no Injuns, an' thar hain't no road-agents, an' I hain't lookin' for a No'ther," was the assuring reply of Texas Thad.

CHAPTER XX.

COMPARING NOTES.

PRAIRIE PINK, having succeeded without difficulty in finding out from Endicott the object of his mission to San Antonio, was not long in acquainting his pard, Butternut Ben, with all the facts. Indeed, having promised the former that he would secure the assistance, in carrying out his design, of a man who could be relied on, he very naturally thought at once of his long-tried and true pard.

But the question now was, would it be safe for Ben, who had already been seen, and probably closely noted by Endicott, to appear before him in this confidential character? Pink felt a little dubious in the matter.

The scouts were seated in a room at the temporary lodgings of Butternut Ben, and the latter was opening his eyes, and occasionally his mouth as well at the revelations that were being made to him.

"Yer see, pard," Prairie Pink was saying, "ther famerly seems ter hev consisted o' these two—ther young cizenzen what disappeared so kinder mysterious, an' this yere gal, what's supposed ter be lately 'roved in Injuns, an' what this cuss Endicott are layin' fer now in San Antone."

"I made thet much o' a diskivery myself, thar in York," remarked Ben.

"So yer did, pard. I hed cl'ar disremembered thet. Wa-al yer see, ther ole man 'fore he bu'sted a trace, made a will leavin' nigh onter all ther wealth he hed ter this boy o' his'n what warn't it 'pears over strong; an' pervidin' in the ewent o' ther young rooster's pegg'in' out, thet this durned kiote, Endicott, should hev ther last cent."

"An' he's made sure, yer says, that ther younker air gone up?"

"Sure as taxes," was Pink's reply.

"Then what in thunder war Texas Thad a-doin' an' whar air he perergrimatim, ter now? When I want's a man fer picket duty again I'll volunteer for ther post myself."

"Ther gal bein' alone now, es it war, an' 'posed ter all kinds o' danger an' sich, this hyer Endicott hes come on ter be sorter in ther way, in case he's wanted."

"Hit's a strong suit, this yere comin' in on ther nick o' time, an' hit air mighty sure ter hev right smart influence on ther gal. Ther cuss hes made his calkerlations dog-goned clost, an' ther chances air if melbe so she ain't pisen-sot ag'in' him, thet he makes ther rifle. He seems most dead sure on hit."

"Then ther cowardly gerlcot don't 'tend no harm ter ther galf" added Butternut Ben.

"Only jist so fur es marryin' of her mought be sot down as bodily injury," said Pink; "an' ther way I looks et hit, durned ef ther don't seem thet objection ter ther perceedin's."

"But what ye reckons ther gerlcot wants o' ther gal, when he steps inter ther money without tlein' up? Didn't he let out thet ther bull shebang fell ter him when ther younker passed in his chips?"

"Jist what he said," assented Pink.

"Then I says ag'in what in ther name o' Davy Crockett do he want o' ther kaiker?"

"Kase ther durned cuss air dead in love with ther gal. Thet's ther 'scuse he gi'ns fer bein' on the trail, an' hit seems sorter nat'ral."

"Ther dog-goned cowardly murderin' pirut! Ther condemned kiote, what put outen ther world, er w'at's ther same thing, sot on a par' o' cut-throats ter do ther biz for him, ther gal's brother, ter get her wealth and bis'n; an' now ter pertend he's in love with ther gal—hit's enough to make a dog strike his step-father!"

"Yer don't b'have he car's for her then?"

"Course he must in his way," said Ben; "but durn his way. In love with the gal—Bah! Hit 'u'd make a cat have fits, jist ter meditate on hit. Ef thet's bein' in love, I air dog-goned glad I never 'perienched ther sensation!"

It was quite evident that however much the old scout might believe in love, he had very little faith in the purity of the sentiment that was now the ruling passion of James Endicott's life.

"Wa-al," continued Pink, "thar ain't no sich thing, I don't reckon, es countin' on ther course a human air like ter take in love er pollytics, when onc't he gits offen ther right trail."

"Dog me!" interrupted Ben; "ef I b'lieve this 'tarnal cuss war ever onter hit. I've hearn somewhar, 'bout some what has been born wicked, an' I air ready ter swar this sneak Endicott fills ther bill."

"Jist es likely. Wa-al bows-mever, he hes made one thing purty clear. He air boun' ter hev ther gal. An' es he 'pears determined ter make a good impression et ther start, hit do seem that he must hev no slouch of a 'pinion of her."

"Es you just spit hit out, now thet he hes ther spondulicks what belonged ter the girl's brother, an' what, ef her ole dad hadn't bin what I reckon he war, a wrongheaded ole catawampus catamount, orter bin hern now, thar don't seem no reason why he shu'd want ther calker tied onter him."

"But yer sees, pard, he hes come on right smart of a long trail arter ther game, an' hit stan's ter sense thet he must vally hit accordin'."

"An' he opines thet ef he could kinder git her capter'd an' come in as reskyer, hit 'u'd put him jist whar he'd like ter be in ther gal's 'fec-tions?"

"Dog'd ef he ain't a sharp!"

How far James Endicott was likely to justify this encomium from the old scout remains to be seen; but, of one thing we are certain—whatever had been alleged and justly against that worthy young gentleman in the quarter of a century that he had passed on this rolling sphere, no one had ever accused him of being a "flat."

His plan now as he had explained pretty fully to Prairie Pink, was to appear before Miss Davenant, in the character of her nearest male relative; as having come to San Antonio, on hearing of her loss, that he might see that she had every comfort and protection that could be procured for her.

Along with this he would have, to recommend him, the knowledge on Dolly's part that he was now wealthy; and not that alone, but the pos-

essor of her home, and of everything that was endeared to her from associations.

Both of these would be powerful auxiliaries in a great many cases; but Mr. Endicott had an unpleasant impression on his mind that Miss Davenant had no very exalted opinion of his character, that, in short, she disliked him, for some reason amazingly.

The little circumstance of her having made all her preparations for their departure for the south, without so much as dropping a hint to him of their intentions—and which he very naturally could not erase from his mind—was a strong proof that she held him in no close or confidential relation.

But he had now, as we may see, other, and he believed potent recommendations, to the young lady's favor; and he hoped to add to these one that could hardly fail to convince her of his worth and of his regard. If such a passion as Endicott's could be dignified by the name of love, the strength of it, in his case, would almost have hidden a multitude of sins. Love pure and unselfish, was a sentiment of which James Endicott had never been capable, and which as we well know he had no right to offer to any but the wife he had wronged; but if its flame could have purged the past, could have burned out the fearful crime that now lay on his soul, the very strength of the passion might have been his salvation.

But such men as James Endicott, though they may be swayed heart and soul and mind by the force of the passion within them, are never in the least purified by it. It must and nearly always does incite them to further deeds of guilt; it never turns their feet into the paths of virtue, their heads and their hands to the performance of what is right.

Endicott, when he recalled the strong marks of dislike which Dolly Davenant had seemed to manifest toward him, had some misgivings that his deeply-laid scheme might fail even in the hour of apparent success.

Though he might succeed in appearing to her in the character not only of a sympathizing friend and kinsman, whose presence here was owing solely to the fact that he wished to be of service to her, but also in that of her preserver from captivity and perhaps death, he was by no means sure that she would not almost prefer the latter. And he was not far wrong in his surmises. Dolly's dislike to him was even greater than he imagined; her fear of him was the strongest sentiment of which she was now capable.

But he was resolved to trust all upon this throw of the dice. By his smooth-tongued arguments and special pleading—and he was well aware of his abilities in that respect—he intended to prove to her, not merely his devotion to herself, but his regret that the Davenant estates should have fallen to him, as the result of a catastrophe which he deplored scarcely less than herself.

Then he would offer—nay, he would insist upon restoring to her the property out of which, otherwise, he must always feel that he had in some way defrauded her. She would refuse of course; he only wished he could be as sure of everything else as that. Naturally from that the way would be made easy to urge her acceptance of it, incumbered only by himself. If gratitude and appreciation of true and manly delicacy had any place in Miss Davenant's composition, she surely could not resist that.

He would make her his wife. Rose Endicott, his real wife, who had of her own free will repudiated him, would never think of interfering—she was too anxious to preserve her own *incognita* to do anything of the kind—and Dare Davenant would never rise in judgment against him in this world; at all events no voice would come up from the depths of the East River to forbid the sacrilegious banns.

But could this scout, Joe Pinkston, be depended upon to arrange for the carrying out of his plan—would he meet him at the appointed time, with the trusty pard of whom he had spoken, and receive the final instructions before setting to work?

There was need for haste, Endicott felt, for he had just received from the postmaster at Indianola intelligence of the departure of Miss Davenant, the young lady who had arrived there, by the packet North Star, on her last trip for San Antonio.

Miss Davenant had attached herself, so the letter stated, to a wagon-train with which were a man, his wife, two daughters, two half-grown boys and a negro man. No mention, it will be perceived, was made of the scout, who had been engaged to accompany them, Endicott's correspondent having either been ignorant of the presence of Texas Thad with the party or else having forgotten to make mention of it.

The wily plotter need have been under no apprehension in regard to Prairie Pink's promptness.

The honest and indignant borderer was only too anxious, for reasons of his own, to enter into it. He was now arranging matters with and for his pard, in order that there might be no danger of the recognition of the latter by Endicott; for Butternut Ben, though he had kept as "shady" as he could while acting the spy in the

Crescent City, had been, as he was aware, more than a little too conspicuous, and he was not altogether certain but that he had impressed himself upon Endicott's memory in New York.

"I kin 'rauge bit, Pard Pink," he said; "or rather we-uns kin make ther riffle 'twixt us. Dog'd ef I hesn't see'd folkses what looked no more like me nor I does like Queen Victory, an' I reckon I kin tumble ter a mask'rade what won't be mistaken for me. Ef I doesn't make up more like somebody else'n ole Butternut Ben, drag me ter the bone-yard!"

The disguise indeed was so perfect that, although still in the garb and with the outward appearance of a scout and frontiersman, Ben would not have been acknowledged by the mother that bore him.

Even Pink, who had officiated as *valet du chambre*, was completely upset by the result of his labors.

"Dog my cats, pard!" he exclaimed; "ef yer thinks o' visting yer sweetheart in *ther* wardrobe, yer'll hev ter take me 'long ter 'dentify yer."

"I tole yer I'd fool ther condemned cuss," was the reply; "an' yer kin jist gamble I'll do hit!"

"Now jist recommember, will yer, when yer gi'ns me an interduct ter ther mangy kiote thet my handle air Cactus Kit; and ef folkses wants ter git too intermit on short acquaintance, they may find out I air a sharp one ter tussle 'long of."

"All kee-rect, Pard Kit! I'll keep a rehears-in' o' yer new cog till arter supper, when we-uns is ter hev the honor of an ordience with his high Mighty Cussedness from Boston, 'York, an' Orleans."

"From what I hearn the durn gerloot spit out, I opines he war raised in ther fu'st named burg; but ef San Antone don't turn out healthier fer him nor hit hes fer some more o' his kidney, I air jub'ous o' his wrastlin' his hash thar fer ther futur'. The game what he played in York air 'nough ter make him swing, an' he seems ter hev no notion o' reformin'. I reckon, though, he didn't come here to git a kerracter."

"He air travelin' on 'count o' his health, air what ther cuss tole me et ther start."

"Jist so," said Butternut, or rather Cactus Kit, as we shall call him for the present; "an' thar air one way thet'll benefit hit mightily in San Antone."

"What yer perscribin' now, ole pard?"

"Ef he wants his days ter be long in the land what his daddies stole from ther Injuns ther only show air in lightin' out from Alama City, and the sooner he lights out ther longer he will live," and Cactus Kit laughed at his own conceit.

CHAPTER XXI.

PLOTTING AND COUNTERPLOTTING.

IN Endicott's anxiety to perfect the plan he had formed in regard to the capture of Dolly Davenant, he had been from the first hour of his arrival in San Antonio looking out for a man of the right stamp whom he could take into his confidence.

Such a one he thought he had found in Monte Max, but a day or two's study of the character and caliber of that worthy, convinced him that he had been rather hasty in his conclusion. It required no great knowledge of human nature to read in Maximo Legere's face that he would not do to tie to.

But, unfortunately, for the plotting rogue, he had not observed his usual reticence; and not only had given his new pal an epitome of his history, but had let fall enough to put that wide-awake young man on the right trail in one sense, though slightly off of it in another. Monte Max was not the man to fail to profit by any knowledge, no matter how it might come to him; and he was troubled with no very conscientious scruples about using it against any one, merely because he might chance to profess friendship. In addition to this, he was slightly piqued at Endicott, for he felt that he had been treated to only half confidence, and that the latter had begun to look around for another agent to do his bidding.

From what he had learned, Max surmised that the object of Endicott's wishing to secure the person of the young lady, was not beauty but booty.

Either a large amount of money was in the possession of this Miss Davenant, or, what was more probable, a large ransom might be expected in the event of her being captured.

Whichever way it was—and Max was positive that Endicott was not the man to be on her trail if it were otherwise—there was money in it, and attended with little danger at that.

The elegant combination gambler and fast man about town might have been seen on the very evening on which Endicott was first taking the scout, Prairie Pink, into his confidence, in close communion with one of the most mysterious individuals then moving in a certain stratum of San Antonio society. This man was known as Captain Quevedo, and his character will be apparent from what we may learn by assuming the part of eavesdroppers on him and Monte Max.

Captain Quevedo was tall, thin, and dark,

and hailed from somewhere on the Rio Grande. His headquarters were at the Menger House, where, it was noticed, he received somewhat extensive correspondence; but he seldom entertained his friends at that popular hostelry, and indeed was rarely seen in communication with any one in the town.

The room in which he and Max Legere were now seated was in quite another kind of resort, and one in which both the grave and dignified Mexican, and the free and easy Creole seemed to feel very much at home.

"You think, then," remarked Quevedo, in reply to something his companion had just said, "that this scout has his eye on you and means no good?"

"He recognized me yesterday—I am certain of that—and I know enough as to his intentions to make me quite solicitous about keeping shady."

"What is the trouble between you?" inquired the Mexican.

"An old difficulty at cards, that is all," replied Monte Max, "in which old Buckskins came out the little end of the horn. He professes, I believe, not to care so much for the dust he lost, as for the way in which I won it."

"Quite likely," said Quevedo, grave as a judge.

"Anyway, I've made up my mind to one thing: if he and his pard waltz around the Alamo City much longer I shall light out."

"Afraid, eh?" queried the Mexican, in his serenely sarcastic way.

"Not much," was the somewhat indignant retort; "but there are reasons, you know, El Capitan, why a man must now and then be a little—"

"Prudent," said Quevedo, helping him to a word.

"Well," said Monte Max, "I don't intend to be bluffed out of this little game, whether or not. Once we have secured the girl, and notified this high-toned Yankee of her whereabouts and what she'll cost him, it will be time enough to think of dodging Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink."

"Like as not, though, they'll be off on some trail of their own in a day or two."

"Just as they please, I'm sure," said Quevedo, carelessly; their movements do not in the least affect me."

"But they might, you know," suggested Max, "in case they make a certain discovery."

"And what might that be?"

"That the disguised and aristocratic Castilian, Senor Quevedo, is Captain of the Foxes of the Frio."

"Hush! Not so loud," said El Capitan, in the same stately manner, but in a tone that was slightly suppressed.

"Oh! I don't imagine that any one suspects," said Monte Max, hastily and reassuringly.

"Just let me suspect it of any one, and he had better look alive, while he can. The Foxes are never caught napping."

"And you look for some of your men in the city, before long?"

"Juan and Jose ought to be here to-night. I have had intimation of their coming and it saves the delay of notifying the band and bringing some of the Foxes here. These two will suffice."

"With ourselves," added Monte Max.

"Certainly. You did not think of including any one else, did you? It would hardly be wise to put any one besides ourselves up to the game," remarked the Mexican.

"Of course not. I am the only one here who knows that the noble Spaniard at the Menger House is head of the most dangerous band of road—"

"Well, never mind! I was only about to say that this knowledge must not go further; and if we took others into our confidence this could scarcely be avoided. We four will fill the bill I reckon."

"No fear of that," said El Capitan, "if the train is nothing more formidable than it has been described to you."

"No mistake about that," was the reply. "Endicott had all the dots, in black and white from Indianola."

"Still if you think they may possibly have secured some allies on the way it might be well to take precautions. My band are too far to the west to be within easy hail but I can manage it."

"In what way?" inquired Max.

"I know a *salon*," said El Capitan, "not a hundred yards from us, where a dozen Mexicans can be found at this moment, any one of whom would knife a man for a five-dollar gold-piece."

"Cheap at half the money I should say; but it happens there is no likelihood of our needing their friendly aid. There is nothing I have ascertained on the way, and these pilgrims are at this time making their slow progress in the innocence of their unsuspecting nature's trusting in Providence."

"And not dreaming," put in the bandit chief, "of Monte Max and the Foxes of the Frio."

"Just so," said Max; "nor of the gay and festive Mr. Endicott, of Boston."

"Well! we must wake them up," said Quevedo. "My two men will report to me at the

Menger as soon as they arrive. They come in the guise of *vaqueros*, don't you see, from my cattle-ranch on the Rio Grande—so it will be best every way for me to see them at my hotel."

"I see," Monte Max assented, admiringly. "Not the slightest show for suspicion that way."

"You have no doubt, I suppose, that there is money in the case?" questioned the captain.

"None in the world, and no small amount at that. This Endicott—you have seen what he is—"

The look of contempt on the face of the Mexican gave that gentleman's estimate of the Bostonian more eloquently than he could have put it in the vernacular.

"Well," resumed Max, "he's not the kind of a fellow that is likely to waste time and money on the trail of a young lady just for sentiment's sake."

"I should imagine not," agreed his companion.

"And he's so mad on this chase," continued the other, "that I can only conclude it means millions."

"He shall share it with us, then," said Quevedo, confidentially.

"That may be considered as settled," was Max's reply. "I fancy I've corraled the game, and we have nothing now to do but to take it."

"But how, in the name of all the fools, did he let you into all this? Was he drunk?"

"No, not exactly. The fact is," said Monte Max, rather hesitatingly, "the cuss began to talk as if he meant business; but the next time I met him he had flown the track entirely—hadn't a word more to say on the subject."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the Mexican, softly. "He saw, I fancy, that you were not the man for his money. Not quite so reliable as he at first supposed. It does credit to his discernment, I must say."

The young gambler by no means liked this.

"I don't care," he exclaimed, quite angrily, "whether he did or not! I shall see that he pays for it now."

"Quite right, my friend; but don't you see it opens up another view of the case?"

"What is that?" asked Max.

"Having decided that your valuable services were not just what he required, Senor Endicott has by this time secured some one else."

"Very probable," replied the Creole. "I don't care a continental if he has."

"Only this: we must be prepared for that as well as for the train."

"It will be nothing very formidable," was the cool rejoinder. "I happen to know all it is likely to amount to, and where we are to look for it."

"Pray enlighten us, Senor Legere?"

"This Endicott's plan was to get up a couple of men in Indian rig, full war-paint and feathers—myself and another, you know—who were to ambush these greenies about ten miles east of here. No trouble in the world about that. Then, after having disposed of the others and secured the plunder, including the lady, we were to make off, only, however, to be surprised by the brave Bostonian, who was, single-handed, to rescue the maiden."

"Capital!" exclaimed El Capitan. "Admirably planned, I must say. But by this time he had doubtless secured the braves for the war-path."

"I think it likely," was the answer. "But you can see how easy this makes it for us. All we have to do is to storm the train at some distance further east, and then quarter on these ambushing sham hostiles, thus euchering Mr. Endicott as well."

"Santiago! You are a statesman, friend Max. I was mistaken. The Senor Americano made a misdeal when he left you out."

"He may find it so," said the Creole, with a self-satisfied smile. "Anyway, I am quite as well pleased with affairs as they are."

"And so am I," came in a whisper from a man who had just finished a mint julep in an adjoining room, and owing to the condition of the dividing wall—which had not been perceived by the two men on the other side—had heard nearly every word that had passed between them.

Butternut Ben was as good in the role of a detective as in that of a scout.

"Drag me ter ther bone-yard!" he exclaimed, when he had reached the street unobserved, "ef I hesn't got the durned pa'r of or'nary cut-throats tooth and toe-nail. An' so Captain Quevedo air ther leader o' ther Foxes o' ther Frio. Reckon thet'll 'bout wind up his career in San Antone. But we-uns must let him out along o' Monte Max on this yere trail jist fer the fun o' ther thing."

"Won't Pard Pink be sot back when he l'arns what I hes struck on a lone trail ter-night?"

"Hyer I hes bin keepin' outen ther way o' thet durned cowardly kiote of an Endicott, fear'd he'd recomember my phiz, and leaving hit ter Pink ter git all ther dots, an' now I hes it all down fine, on a lone han'. Durned ef I don't crow over him fer ther nex' six moons; an' I doesn't know ef I lets up on him then."

There was indeed good reason for this exultation on the part of the old scout.

He had been not a little puzzled as to the best way in which to start on the proposed trail, on which so little "sign" had been discovered by himself and his pard, and thus, accidentally, as we have seen, and from those whom he had not suspected of being in the plot, he had stumbled upon the entire scheme, and not only this, he had found out that the haughty, self-contained Castilian, Quevedo, was the captain of the most notorious band of road-agents, then terrorizing all who approached San Antonio from the south and west.

James Endicott had gained nothing, but rather lost in every way, by transferring his confidence from Monte Max, the gambler, to Prairie Pink, the scout. The latter was confirmed in his own opinion on the subject when he listened to the intelligence brought him by Butternut Ben, of all that he had overheard.

He made only one remark, however: "That cl'ar upsets ther Injun part of our p'ogramme, ole pard!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FOLLOWING HIS FATE.

WHEN Marm Carraway, in answer to the inquiry of Vivian Fairfax for Miss Davenant informed him that the young lady had suddenly taken her departure, the disappointment of the young man was a surprise to himself. The interest he had felt in the lonely and singularly beautiful girl, from the first moment that he beheld her, had been increased by the little which he had learned of her history and the object of her visit to Texas. Added to this, his conversation with her on the previous night had brought out the fact that they had strangely enough something in common.

That something was now the one thought uppermost in Vivian's mind—the man for whom he was there lying in wait.

This lovely and mysterious woman knew James Endicott.

More than that, her manner more than her words, had convinced him that she feared this distant relative of her own, who was now the sole male representative of her family.

Could it be, Vivian asked himself, that the intimation he had given her that Endicott was expected daily in Indianola had hastened the departure of Miss Davenant?

The same thought had occurred to him the evening before when he returned to his hotel; a feeling of regret that he had so abruptly announced a piece of intelligence which he felt convinced had startled her.

And with his self-reproaches on the subject, there came suddenly to him the first glow of a sentiment to which his whole life until now had been a stranger.

There was something besides a common interest, a common wrong as he felt convinced it must be, that seemed drawing these two loiterers on that Southern shore together. At first he failed to comprehend the nature and strength of the sentiment as was but natural.

"We are situated so much alike,"—so he sought to explain it to himself—"she is alone in the world and I have no one"—one bitter memory of Rose, here came in as a mental saving clause—"belonging to me. If we should ever be anything more to each other."

He paused, for at this moment the truth burst suddenly upon him. It was like a transformation.

Vivian seemed to breathe a new atmosphere, to see everything around him through a brighter and more translucent medium.

"Anything!" he exclaimed. "We must be everything to each other. We are already, and naught on earth can come between us!"

His heart bounded at the strange, sweet sense that now at last he had something to hope for, to live for; some one whose affairs should be his, and who in turn would be interested in all that concerned him.

The thought did not once enter his mind that she, Miss Davenant, might very possibly be far from thinking that she had part or lot in the matter—that not one thought of him might have ever entered her mind. Nothing of the sort came up to dim the brightness of this glorious day-dream.

Vivian Fairfax walked and meditated as though he were already an accepted lover.

And she, Dolores, at that very moment was kneeling in the agony of the new-born terror that Vivian's last words had brought to her.

"Why does this wretch pursue me, as I have felt since I have been left alone, that he would do? He must know that I loathe—abhor him!"

"Is it not enough that I have lost all that made life worth the living, but I must be hunted down in this way, as though I were some guilty thing? Oh, Dare! Dare! had you but been spared to me! But I am alone, all alone!"

Then, as a light in a dark place, came up before her in her desolation, the image of the man with whom she had but a few minutes before been speaking. It was strange, but her utter loneliness made the feeling accountable to herself—it burst upon her like an inspiration that she could trust him.

Dolly arose from her knees, went to the window and looked out upon the night.

The roar of the surf was stilled to a low mur-

mur before it reached her; the only clouds on the sky were of soft, fleecy whiteness, and the only shadows that rested anywhere lay as down upon the sands. The moon glowed clear and calm in its glory of silver, and the sea beamed back on it in its beauty of green and azure.

She turned away from it strengthened, nerved to defy fate, and to take her destiny into her own hands.

She would trust no one. She would fly from friendship as well as from persecution.

But with Vivian Fairfax, when he found that Miss Davenant had really gone, the bracing of his moral fabric came in another way. The dream that had been his for so many months had vanished, or was absorbed in the one that now engrossed every faculty of his soul and body. Revenge for the time was swallowed up by love.

Vivian has been described as being somewhat eccentric in habits and character. It is not to be inferred from this statement that this generalization of him implied anything more than the fact that he was something more, or less, than a very recognizable copy of the average society man of his age and position. It was simply that there was nothing imitative about him.

That however is bad enough in a general way for the verdict of humanity is always severe on any individual member of the species who presumes to differ from the rest.

Vivian was nothing more than a young man of average intelligence, brave and frank and manly, to a fault, and who had learned enough to see through many of the shams and delusions of life, which continue to look like realities to men of much wider experience than had been his, and which the world calls upon its votaries to treat as real.

With all this he had fallen in love—it is the only expression that meets the case—with a young woman of whom he knew nothing beyond the little that she had told him of herself, and with whom he had conversed but once in his life.

The eyes of the young man brightened even amid his grief and disappointment with gratified pride and affection as he listened to the glowing encomiums pronounced by Marm Carraway on the fair lodger she had just lost. The honest landlady was anything but an important person it was true; but in Vivian's eyes, she held the most enviable position of any woman in the Lone Star State. She was not the rose, but she had been near the Rose.

For the moment Marm Carraway represented to her eager listener all the oratory that was worthy of the name in the universe.

Highly sensible people before now, have been tempted at some great crisis in their lives to listen to as if it were an oracle the utterance of some simple ignorant creature, whose advice on any other occasion they would have scorned.

"You have been a good friend to Miss Davenant," he said to the landlady; "and I shall always feel grateful to you for it."

He spoke so warmly and so earnestly without noticing that he did so, that Marm Carraway, with all the marvelous discernment of her sex, saw the true state of the case, as far as Vivian was concerned. The good lady went even further. She at once decided that the prepossessing stranger before her had known Miss Dolly of old, and had come to Indianola in quest of her.

The idea never once occurred to the unsophisticated soul that reciprocity might be wanting.

The young man had every appearance of being all that was eligible, and her late quest was in trouble and wholly unprotected, so nothing more desirable could be imagined. Mrs. Carraway was simply and thoroughly delighted at this new phase in the affairs of the young lady in whom she had taken a warm and motherly interest.

"I reckon ye'll be follerin' her right off," she suggested before the idea had taken any definite form in Vivian's mind.

He hesitated but it was more from a reluctance to make a confidante of Marm Carraway than aught else.

"Gracious peace!" exclaimed that excellent lady, quite scandalized at the young man's apparent indecision; "yer needn't ter mind what ther or'nary no-count lot 'bout hyeraways thought think."

"Folkses like you-uns needn't ter keer more for thar spite an' gossip nor we does 'bout ther buzzin' o' so many san'-flies."

Then catching what she considered a rather ambiguous look still on Vivian's face, the worthy old soul continued:

"Yer don't mean ter say yer don't keer? Wa-al, I'd never 'a' think that! Yer keered 'nough fer ther gal ter come all ther way from some outlandish place up No'th on trail o' her; an' ef thet don't show yer is sot on marryin' ef her, then I don't know beans when ther bag's open."

"An hyer yer is, jist 'scaped meeting o' her by ther shank o' the day, an' yer is skeered ter foller ther trail lessen these hyer triffin' scum mought sot tha'r tongues waggin'. I kin tell yer hit didn't useter be ther way whar I was raised, 'way back in Hackensack."

"When Ole Man Dan Carraway war a-co'tine

me, an' I war nowhar nigh wo'th talkin' about ther best day I ever see'd, like Miss Dolly air, he war ready ter foller me ter ther end o' ther yearth an' jump off."

"So would I for Miss Dolly," said Vivian Fairfax, earnestly.

"Thet's right, stranger. I reckoned yer'd come to ther p'int," returned Marm Carraway.

"On, that's all right, you may be sure," said Vivian, hastily, not much relishing these abrupt conclusions on the part of Miss Davenant's humble friend and ardent admirer; "you needn't feel at all apprehensive about that. I had no idea, however, that Miss Davenant intended setting out at once for San Antonio. Had she met with any friends?"

"Wa-al, she jist kinder tuck up es it were, of suddint with a triflin'-lookin' gang o' dirt-eaters travelin' thet-a-way. She said 'twas ther very thing she'd bin waitin' fer. But I reckon somehow she wouldn't 'a' lit out all ter onc't but fer ther man, who kinder conducted her inter it, so ter speak."

"A man—a stranger?" cried Fairfax, in alarm.

"A stranger ter me, fer I never happened ter git my peepers onter him," said Marm Carraway.

"I war out when he kim in ter tell Miss Dolly 'bout ther time fer startin', an' when she war sayin' good-by ter ther bull caboodle of us, ther pilgrim, whoever he mought be, war off right smart ahead totin' o' ther traps."

"So you didn't see him?"

"Nary squint," was the reply.

"Nor hear his name?"

"Blest ef I kin remember."

Vivian's heart beat fast, as he took leave of Marm Carraway, and turned away sadly, and in no little anxiety as well as disappointment, from her hospitable home.

It was not so much that Dolores Davenant had left thus hastily and mysteriously, though that in itself was saddening and perplexing, as this latest intimation that a man whom the landlady had not been able to describe, but who evidently possessed no little influence over the friendless girl, was the companion of her journey and probably had instigated it.

But one form, and one name rose up before him at that moment.

The man whom Dolly had told him now represented to her all that was sad in past and present and fearful in the future—the man whom he himself had been waiting and watching here in Indianola—this man, this wretch, had arrived, unknown to him; had come and gone, and for the second time had decoyed from him the one light that gleamed for him amid earth's darkness!

Was James Endicott destined thus to blight his life the second time? Was this villain still to triumph over the innocent and the wronged?

For Vivian Fairfax firmly believed that he saw Endicott's hand and brain and devilish presence in this new wreck of his heart and hopes.

How or in what way, the villain had succeeded in prevailing on the poor girl who apparently had so dreaded him, to take this hurried step; what mysterious and devilish influence he might possess over her, Vivian could not imagine, nor was he one to waste time in idle conjecture.

The case was one that demanded the most decisive action. How fortunate—nay rather, how providential it had been that thus early in their acquaintance he had thus called to inquire after her welfare!

Hastily making his arrangements which consisted in securing a trusty guide, with horses selected both for endurance and speed, Vivian Fairfax set out on his journey to San Antonio.

Every thought of the past was now merged in the present, every dream dispelled by the stern reality of this awakening to a new existence.

No longer, was his motive in life that of vengeance; no longer, what it had seemed for the few blissful hours just past, vengeance absorbed in love; but the strongest combination that impelled man to action—*love and revenge!*

CHAPTER XXIII.

WOMAN AT HER BEST.

"ONLY an actress!" So sneered the many ignorant, thoughtless and utterly useless daughters of Eve, as they ever have done when acts of charity and self-denial were credited to Rose St. Evremont and others of her so little understood Sisterhood of the Footlights.

Only an actress. As if there were anything in itself in a profession so aptly described as:

"The youngest of the sister arts,
Where all their beauties blend,"

that could degrade or unsex the best and purest:

It was true Rose St. Evremont was but a woman and an actress, and therefore no womanly and benevolent deeds were to be expected of her, and when seen were not to be acknowledged.

Yes, only a woman! That is the cry, the wide world over. The poor sewing-girl works, weary-eyed and starving till at last she fills a pauper's grave. No matter—she is only a woman!

The wife toils from early dawn till loneliest

midnight to feed and clothe a worthless drunken husband and his sickly babes. Who cares to notice her life of unrequited toil? She is only a woman! The widow, wan and cheerless, seldom tearless, bends under her weight of woe and wait until at last she sobbing knocks at the almshouse door: Let her beg. She is only a woman!

And James Endicott's wronged and deceived wife had committed the unpardonable sin, in the social Pharisaic eye, of adding to the inherited curse, by adopting, as a means of livelihood, the calling which many self-appointed judges of the acts and motives of others have united in placing under the ban. Henceforth therefore, no matter what her life of sacrifice and self-devotion might be, all her deeds and words must be viewed through a distorted medium. Her husband might be, the gambler, the violator of every law, human and divine that he was; no matter—society could afford still to recognize him.

When Rose St. Evremont made the two-fold discovery that the young man without a name was the Davenant heir, just reported to have been lost at sea, and that the daughter of the Davenant house was the one who had been selected by her unprincipled husband as his next victim, her resolution was at once taken.

She remembered Endicott's parting words to herself:

"Only let me go free. Let me marry without creating any scandal; and then, go and marry whom you like. I give you your freedom. All I ask in return is my own freedom."

Rose had promised nothing. The truth was she cared but little; as why should she? True, he was contemplating a crime; but he would probably do something of the kind in any event, and the commission of it would leave her free from any chance of future annoyance at his hands. Later on she had indeed determined to thwart him in his design should it come to her knowledge, but she had given herself but little concern in regard to it.

But now the whole scheme in its unparalleled iniquity was suddenly laid bare before her. She could not doubt what were the designs of Endicott in this journey to Texas. Neither could she doubt that his had been the invisible hand in the attempted taking off of the young man Dare Davenant.

The latter no sooner had seen, as in a mirror, at the first mention of the name that he had so strangely lost, the whole events of the life that before had seemed to have passed from him, than he recalled the circumstances attending his attempted assassination. Yet, strange to say he had no suspicion of the hand that had moved the wires.

It was not so with Rose.

The moment that she read the statement that her worthless husband had succeeded to the estate on the death of Dare Davenant, she felt certain as though she had seen the blow struck, that James Endicott had stooped to the work of an assassin.

"Would you know again the men whom you accompanied to inspect your baggage after you had gone on board the packet?" she asked Dare.

"I would not," was the reply. "They were dressed as porters; indeed I have no doubt as I had not then, that they were really such."

"And I know," said the lady in a decided tone, "that they were nothing of the kind."

"What mean you?" exclaimed Dare in surprise.

"Just what I say. That those men did not belong to the North Star."

"What then?" he inquired.

"That they were sent on board, in that disguise, and paid to do their work."

"But by whom?"

"By your heir, James Endicott."

"Good Heavens!"

Like a flash, the whole truth seemed to come upon Dare Davenant. The man to whose discredit he had known so much for years past, whom of late he had disliked and avoided, and whom his sister had loathed and feared; this man whom his father had selected after himself, to be his heir, was the one man upon earth who could have any interest in his death. He had been foiled, but as yet, he knew nothing of that; and she, Dolly, helpless and a fugitive was now at his mercy.

"I might have known it," the young man muttered as the revelation came to him. "I ought to have suspected him from the first. But you, Miss St. Evremont, how came you to see the hand of James Endicott in this thing?"

You appear to have forgotten that my attention was attracted by that notice in the New Orleans paper, not by the mention of your name—of that I knew nothing, but by that of my husband."

"Your husband?"

"Yes, you have not forgotten that I told you I had been—God help me!—that I am a wife!"

"I know," said Dare sadly, "and the man's name, your husband is—"

"James Endicott!"

Dare Davenant was silent, stupefied in fact.

"Now you know all," said the lovely woman.

"But this all," she exclaimed, after a mo-

ment's pause, "is but the beginning. There is something more to be considered."

"I know," he said; "and that is yourself."

"Not I," she cried, "not I! Little do I care how soon or in what way James Endicott finishes his evil course: but I do care for the wrong, the injury he would inflict upon others. That I must prevent."

"Oh, the property?" said Dare, somewhat indifferently. "He can have but a brief enjoyment of that. And I feel to-day after all I have gone through, as if I had taken out a new lease of life. I have not been so strong mentally and physically in years. So you see that worthy gentleman's chances for stepping into permanent possession, barring through a more successful attempt at assassination, are, I fancy, a little remote."

"I was not thinking of that," was the answer, "but of Miss Davenant."

"Of Dolly?"

"Yes; of your sister."

"I do not quite understand you."

"Do you not see," said Miss St. Evremont, "what all this means? or shall I read that extract to you again? Miss Davenant went on, as indeed she had no choice otherwise, to Texas."

"I know," said Dare; "and what then?"

"She is there still."

"Well?"

"And James Endicott is there by this time also."

"My God!" cried the young man. "I had not thought of that."

"It is not to be wondered at," said the lady, "that you have not. You have only begun to grasp a faint outline of this plot against you and yours."

"I know this wretch whom I have called my husband better than any one besides can know him. One hint at a scheme of his is sufficient for me to see the end from the beginning. He has had no fear that I would ever interfere with him to the extent of asserting a claim upon him."

"And you will not?" demanded Dare, eagerly.

"I have vowed that I never would. More than aught else upon earth have I dreaded that he might one day, for some reason or other, claim me again as his wife. Nothing could be more terrible to me. Nothing do I ask at his hands but that our secret and ill-starred marriage shall remain a secret."

"And you still feel so—you still desire it?"

"If possible, more than ever, more strongly each day that I live. For all that, I am resolved now to make it public."

"And why?" he asked, eagerly. "That you may seek to have it canceled?"

"No," replied Rose; "that I may save another."

"Another? Whom can you mean?"

"Who, but your own sister—the girl whom this villain would now mock with the name of wife he has no right to bestow on her, Dare Davenant!"

"But she would never wed him?"

"How know you that, Mr. Davenant?"

"She despises him."

"She is a woman," was the reply.

"You have a poor opinion of your own sex, I see, Miss St. Evremont."

"Hear me," she said; "I know nothing of your sister, of her temperament, her likes and dislikes. But, this I do know. Dolores Davenant is in a strange land, alone and unprotected. James Endicott is a distant relative, and her father's heir. He is, or professes to be in love with her. He is, in some respects a fascinating man; the very style of scoundrel whom few of her sex can resist. He appears before your sister now with almost everything in his favor, with all that he can desire to recommend him."

"Very true."

"And as I have said she is a woman."

"You do not think that Dolly would ever consent to be his?"

"I feel that she may be, notwithstanding."

"But I can and will prevent it," cried Dare.

"You will make the attempt I know," said the lady. "Whether or not you will succeed is a question. I fear you may not."

"You think that my sister will be sacrificed in that way?"

"There is danger," was the answer; "but I have said it is in my power to save her, and I will."

"I shall start immediately for Texas," said the young man.

"You must do so, of course," said Miss St. Evremont calmly. "I also am going to Texas."

Whatever had been the inherent weakness of Dare Davenant's nature it had never been a lack of moral courage. His defects of character were not so much natural ones, as slight foibles, which had been nursed and encouraged by illness and an over-indulgent father until they had begun to assume undue proportions. At heart, the young man had ever been true, and manly and self-reliant.

And with it all Dare had never been without plenty of strength to toil and struggle, provided only there was anything for which it was worth his pains to labor. With all his apparent weakness of character he would have cheerfully served seven years for the Rachael of his hopes,

who might not be attainable in any other way. He had too, that which is so rare in young men of the present day, the courage which leads us, for some higher end, to defy the world's opinion, to brave the consequences of its censure.

And having this the greatest quality of the truly great he could see and appreciate it in others.

He had begun by a feeling of gratitude toward the beautiful one who had been the one light in the gloom that for a time had shrouded his mental vision. He had gone on to a feeling of a sense of completeness in her presence, which was lacking at all other times. He had grown to worship, with the full force of his æsthetic nature the beautiful, perfectly poised woman of the world who was little more than a girl in years. In short he had fallen in love as he fully believed for the first time, in his life.

He had now to see and appreciate in his soul's idea a depth of truth and devotion to principle, which though it might end in removing her forever from all chance of becoming his, placed her upon a pedestal above all that he had ever dreamed of in woman.

"You will then leave New York at once?" Dare asked.

"I shall ask to-day at all costs, to have my engagements canceled. I shall plead family reasons of the most serious and painful nature. In short, I will not be refused."

"And once in Texas, Miss St. Evremont?"

"I shall seek out my husband."

Dare Davenant winced:

"And then?" he inquired.

"I shall declare myself to be his wife. I have kept the proofs, though many a time of late I have been tempted to destroy them. I shall claim him now, wretch, murderer though he is"—she shuddered visibly as she uttered this resolution. "It is the only way to prevent the crime he has in contemplation. Dolores Davenant must be saved."

"And you?" queried Dare in admiration.

"If" she said with a laugh; but, oh, how unnatural. "I shall be again Mrs. James Endicott."

"And then—oh, Rose!" he cried.

"God knows! God only knows!" was the bitter response.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FOXES OF THE FRIO.

THE band of which the mysterious Captain Quevedo was the leader was at one time the terror of the country to the west and southwest of San Antonio, but had of late met with mishaps which had greatly depleted its numbers and lessened its importance.

Of late its existence had been thought by many to be a thing of the past, as nothing had recently been heard of their depredations; and a general impression seemed to prevail in and around the Alamo City that this once formidable gang of road agents had either disbanded or else taken themselves off to the other side of the Rio Grande.

The connection of Quevedo with the bandits, was, of course, neither known or suspected, for that grave and rascally senor was keeping up his *incognito* with all the airs and sober dignity of a Hidalgo. Monte Max was indeed the one man in San Antonio who was in the bandit chief's confidence.

The young Creole, in reality more weak than wicked, was well aware that he might be running his head into a noose by this intimate companionship with a man whose true character was liable at any moment to be discovered; but his vanity had been tickled by this singling out of him by the haughty and dignified Spaniard, and once in the position of confidant, he had a wholesome fear of trying to escape its consequences and responsibilities.

The remains of Quevedo's band, on account of a want of vigilance on the part of certain United States troops, were now lurking in a cavern not many miles from the city, and occasionally communicating with El Capitan, sometimes in person, but oftener through Maximio Legere.

We have seen that the bandit chief, on being apprised by the latter of the expected train from the East, and the plan of Endicott for having let Monte Max into which, the gentleman from Boston had suddenly seemed to repent, referred to the fact that a couple of his men would be in the city presently in the guise of cowboys, and with their aid Endicott could be completely circumvented, and the train, with the mysterious young lady, the possession of whom was evidently Endicott's first object, would fall into their power.

Prompt as the evening itself, the two bandits were on hand, and with the utmost nonchalance, put in an appearance at the Menger House and inquired for El Senor Quevedo.

The dignified gentleman whom they sought came to the office when summoned, and, after some business conversation in regard to his cattle ranch on the Rio Grande—a conversation conducted openly, and without any desire apparently for concealment—they were joined by Monte Max.

The latter soon suggested cards—it was a way he had—and the quartette adjourned to

Quevedo's apartment, ostensibly for that purpose. Once there the game, which we will take the liberty of observing unperceived, was begun without delay.

"You will be glad to know," was the first remark of El Capitan to his men, as soon as they were seated in his room, "that there is a good show for business in a day or two."

"It's none too early in showing itself," said one; "for things have never been so blue with the Foxes in my time."

"No show for booty, eh?" said Max.

"Well well," was the reply of Quevedo, a little petulantly, "that hasn't been my fault or yours either, for that matter. But a flock of geese is now on the wing in this direction; and the fattest of all and the most worth plucking, if I mistake not, is close at hand."

"But that is to come later," said the Creole.

"Now, Juan," continued the captain, "this is not much of an outfit, as far as strength goes, and I think we are quite equal to them as we stand."

"It will only make delay, and very possibly create some little danger of detection, if we send out for some more of the Foxes to join us."

"What I have decided on is this, and I have only waited for you and Jose to arrive and hear my plan. You two, with Legere and myself, will start out in the morning for a ride. Let me see. Oh, yes, Max and I can be accompanying you a short distance on your way back to my ranch."

"About twenty miles west of the city—you know the spot—we can ambush them, and the rest is easy."

"How many men in the lay-out?" asked Jose.

"Only one, and a negro," was the reply of Quevedo; ignorant, as was Endicott, of the presence of the scout with the train.

"Caramba!" exclaimed the two men.

"There are a couple of boys," added Monte Max.

"But neither of them," explained the captain, "of an age to handle a rifle. Was not that what the Gringo said?" turning to Max.

The gambler nodded assent.

This estimate made by Endicott rather hastily, from the slight mention that had been made by his Indianola correspondent of the composition of the immigrant train, was hardly a just one.

Those youthful Bilberries, Buck and Bud, however much their education might have been neglected in other respects, were quite up to the Texas standard in this particular.

"So you see," Quevedo went on, "it is only child's play that we have to prepare for."

"This Endicott has his plans to attack or rather cause to be attacked the train some miles nearer—about ten miles, so Legere thinks, from the city. The infernal fool is getting up an Indian scare—I would just like to see a genuine Apache, for example, come down on him—and then when his men have taken the train, and secured his especial prize, a young lady who is along, the sneaking hound is to come and rescue the senorita at the risk—so she is to suppose—of being scalped himself."

"And we want to prevent the poor fellow's running that risk," suggested Max.

"Precisely," said the captain, in his most suave manner.

The two bandits laughed.

"Then," resumed Quevedo, "having helped ourselves to all that is worth taking, including, of course, this priceless young lady, we must take the back trail for some miles, and then, quartering around, join the Foxes as soon as possible."

"Once at the cave and the senorita comfortably disposed of, I shall return at my leisure to San Antonio—you too, Legere, unless you feel a vocation to take an agency in my company—and there arrange to make terms through some of you with Senor Endicott for the lady's ransom."

"It looks easy enough, El Capitan," said Juan.

"It is easy—all plain sailing," replied the chief. "I have thought so ever since I first got wind of it."

"But, captain," queried Jose, "how did you find this out from the Gringo?"

"Oh," said the chief, with a grim smile, "he thought of taking my friend Senor Legere into the affair with him—to play Indian you know and all that—but Max was incorruptible. In the interests of law and order, he felt it to be his duty to inform me at once. And I, seeing how the land lies, feel constrained to interfere a trifle with Senor Endicott's little game."

"In the first place, as you have just remarked, Juan, the Foxes need game at present, and my first act of charity ought by right to begin at home. Then secondly, as a good Christian, I feel that I must prevent this beautiful senorita from falling into the hands of such a scoundrel as Endicott—just at present."

It certainly seemed, as Captain Quevedo said, that he and his men now held the key to the situation in their hands. Endicott had let fall sufficient in his ill-judged half-confidence with Monte Max to give that delectable personage the key to it, and he was keen enough to find a way of using it to his advantage.

They knew that the Bilberry "outfit" must be now nearing San Antonio, and the arrangement of Endicott was that his "Indians" should waylay the party about ten miles beyond the city, and, after amusing themselves in any way they thought fit with the Bilberry family, should seize Miss Davenant and ride off for their supposed camp. Then that young lady's dire extremity would be his opportunity.

Endicott would ride down upon the braves boldly and, single-handed, rescue the young lady, bearing her off in triumph to San Antonio, after which feat, he flattered himself, he need apprehend no difficulty in his successful siege of her affections.

"He's a strange mixture," said the bandit chief, referring to the Bostonian. "He has some talents which are decidedly wasted for want of a proper field."

"If he knew the country, and the people on the frontier, with his brains and cussedness and disregard for consequences, hanged if I don't think in time he might make a leader!"

And El Capitan Quevedo began to reflect seriously if in some way, when the ransom of the young lady should have been satisfactorily adjusted, this sbrewd villain from the North might not be induced to cast his lot with the Foxes of the Frio. Some new admixture was needed, let it come from what region it might, if the band was to regain its prestige and have its numbers recruited, and it was by no means impossible that this unprincipled stranger who, if not now, was likely soon to become an outlaw, might become carried away with the scope of his talents thus offered and join the band.

"When are we to set out, El Capitan?" asked Jose.

"We make an early start," was the answer.

"I do not suppose that Endicott is likely to defer his going later than to-morrow afternoon, and we must manage to forestall him, and leave no scalps for his warriors to take. You know the spot where we are to ambush them?"

"Oh, yes," said Juan; "I've been all along there."

So he had, indeed. In the palmy days of the Foxes, there were few trails leading to San Antonio where this once-noted band of road-agents had not lain in wait at every available point for the mail-stage or any luckless emigrant-train of the approach of which they had been apprised.

But these days were past, and the handful of men who now acknowledged allegiance to Quevedo were not only few in number, but sadly dispirited, and very careful about attacking any outfit that was the least formidable. The present, if what it had been represented, was certainly nothing to be much feared, and the two men now in San Antonio quite agreed with their captain in thinking no reinforcements were necessary.

"You understand what you have to do," said the chief. "Ride out boldly and demand a surrender, and if that is refused, shoot down all that oppose. Spare none but the young lady."

"Then secure the money and valuables and levant on the back trail. I will accompany you to camp as I have said."

"And then return to San Antonio, El Capitan?"

"Precisely—and then return to San Antonio."

"Will there not be some danger in that?" asked Monte Max.

"Danger! What danger?" inquired Quevedo, haughtily.

"True," replied Max, apologetically; "no one has ever yet suspected you."

"No one is ever likely to suspect Don Antonio Quevedo Garmio of being other than he represents himself, far less of being the leader of the Foxes of the Frio."

The outlaw captain was right. His identity had never been suspected. The halo of aristocratic hauteur with which he had contrived to surround himself since making his headquarters at the Menger, had precluded the possibility of such a thing as impertinent questioning where he was concerned.

Indeed, so far from his pretensions being questioned, the most extravagant tales were told, and generally credited, of the vast wealth and high social standing of the exclusive Castilian, whose acquaintance had become something to be prized.

His plan now, as he had announced it, was to return as rigidly and indifferently as possible to his holdings at the Menger, cultivate the acquaintance of Endicott, or rather permit the latter to make his acquaintance, and then wait for developments. It could hardly fail that the Bostonian would admit him to some degree of his confidence—Quevedo would take care that he did—and thus he would hear for the first time of the girl who had been carried off by the bandits.

Then El Capitan would promise to interest himself. He knew, living near a ranch of his, a man who had once belonged to a band of outlaws, and who still had great influence with several of their leaders. Through him he felt positive that he could learn all that Endicott was desirous of finding out.

Once professing to have made the discovery

of the whereabouts of Senorita Davenant, the bandit chief would inform the American that a ransom could be effected through this ex-out-law's agency, and he would take care to fix the rate at an estimate which the urgency and the supposed financial ability of Endicott would enable him to make. Thus he could earn, in addition, the gratitude of the latter, and in that way, very possibly, secure a further hold upon him.

This was Quevedo's little game, and he felt that he held trump cards.

CHAPTER XXV.

ENDICOTT AND HIS INDIANS.

"WA-AL, drag me ter ther bone-yard!" exclaimed Butternut Ben, as he caught a modified reflection of himself in his new make-up in a mirror in the apartment of his pard. "I be hanged with a lariat ef I c'd pass myself off as Butternut Ben on my own mammy."

"Not much you couldn't," was the reply of Prairie Pink; "an' not much you ain't, on this yere trail. You is Cactus Kit now, an' don't yer disremember it."

"Wa-al, I hopes as I air more liker ther underwiddle yer 'ludes at nor I air like myself. Ther ain't no lingerin' doubts on my mind now that I kin fool ther durned sneakin' kiote."

"He'd be willin' ter swar," said Pink, "that he never sot peepers onter yer afore, lessin hit war in a fit of ther jim-jams; an' durn me ef yer bain't enough ter gi'n ary human in civerlize, a fu'st-class tack o' thet disease just as yer stan's."

"Ef we manages ther Injun togger es well as yer bes got this hyer up, pard—"

"Who in thunder an' lightnin' said anythin' 'bout Injun togger?" demanded Pink.

"I air 'ludin' at ther make-up what we air gwine ter scoop in ther pilgrims with," said Ben. "Who ther dogs air talkin' 'bout scoopin' em in?"

"Yer knows durn well what I means, Pard Pink; I hain't fergot ther programme—we is ter pertend ter scoop in ther outfit."

"An' yer reckons we is ter git up ther performance in Injun togs, does yer?"

"Sartain. Warn't thet what ther cuss purposed?"

"Who ther dogs car's ef he did? I reckon he purposed a durn sight mor'n he's like ter see performed. Yer'd better settle thet, in yer mind, pard Ben—I sh'd say Kit; seems es thet air is yer handle at this fancy-dress s'prise-party."

"Then yer doesn't think o' follerin' out ther gerloots 'strutions in ther matter o' togger?"

"I mought ef I hed a fancy fer gittin' bored; but seein' es I hain't I reckon we-uns'll hev ter git up our costooms on some less expensive plan."

"Hit mought be kinder dangerous," admitted Ben.

"Sartain death and nothin' shorter," was the reply.

"But thar hain't but two er three on 'em arter all," remonstrated Butternut Ben, who had evidently been quite taken with the Indian idea, and disliked to relinquish it.

"Them two er three kin shute, I reckon, ter say nothin' o' ther female weemin; an' ther man er 'oman, ary one, what kin fire a rifle, an' wouldn't plug an Injun on sight, air a human what I never run 'crost till yet, an' never 'spects ter."

"Dog'd ef I don't b'lieve yer is more'n half-right, Pard Pink. Hit ain't goin' ter be a make b'lieve circus anyway fur es we-uns is consarned, an' hit 'u'd be safer, es yer says, ter make ther rifle in 'Nited States togs. But, drag me ter ther bone-yard ef I wouldn't feel 'bout es much ter home in war-paint an' feathers es I does in this hyer Cactus Kit maskerade!"

"Yer'll find hit's ther safest 'mong ther pilgrims what we 'spects ter interview, an' lessen yer hes a fancy fer goin' over the range in ther make-up of a durned red heathen an' wakin' up in thar huntin'-grounds by mistake, yer'd better take a fool's advice fer onc't an' make yer 'rangements ter hang out in Texas fer a few more fleetin' periods."

"Yer is right, pard," said Butternut Ben, "es I most allers finds out yer is in ther long run. So yer thinks we-uns had better just drap in on ther pilgrims in a friendly, sociable kind er way, an' gi'n 'em all ther infermashun 'bout ther 'proachin' circus that they is interested inter?"

"Thet air prezactly my plan o' perceedin's, pard."

"An' I hesn't nothin' ter say ag'in' hit, Pard Pink. Whats more, I is 's'prised thet I didn't tumble ter yer meanin' ter onc't. Hit must ha' bin this dog-goned wardrobe what yer hes put me inter thet makes me onnatural every way."

"Must ha' bin," said Pink; "but ef thet air ther case in civerlized rig, Cactus Kit, dog'd ef yer wouldn't 'a' turned plum durn fool in Injun togs."

"But, pard," queried Ben, "what air we-uns ter do when we has come up with ther outfit an' tole ther pilgrims 'bout this yer' sneakin' kiote an' his 'tentions'?"

"Why, dog-gone hit, Kit, don't yer see thar won't be ther fu'st durn thing for we-uns ter do. Thet air is ther fu'st, an' et ther same time

thar last duty we hester preform. We puts ther pilgrims on thar gyard, an' seein' they won't hev no one but this consarned cuss ter contend with we kin leave 'em ter go on thar way."

"They is strong enough, I reckon; an' when ther condemned kiote rides up an' finds ther kaliker-kivered gal what he's sot arter, an' nary Injun within smellin' distance, he kin settle hit 'longer hisself ef hit's wo'th while ter tempt ther risk."

"I reckon then, we needn't think o' callin' on ther cuss fer our pay when we gits back ter San Antone?" said Butternut Ben.

"We is ter hev ther honor of a partin' interview with his Serene High Mightiness right away, an' I'll take keer, now you mentions hit, thet he'll shell out 'nough spondulicks ter pay fer our trouble. Ther balance we'll 'gree ter leave till ther job air preformed; an' es yer seems ter think hit mought be doubtful ef we-uns had a claim in equerty, shouldn't wonder ef we drapp'd hit right thar."

"Wa-al," said Ben, "ef we hes got to have a confab wi' ther cuss 'fore we starts we mought es well git it over with."

"Yer dreads hit does yer?" asked Pink.

"Ther fact air," was Ben's answer, "I does feel kinder nervous till I sees whether or no ther consarned kiote sees through this durned make-up o' mine. Yer see, pard, if he do—"

"Hit'll be ther woss fer hisself. Thet's all," said Prairie Pink.

"How yer makes thet out?"

"He'll pernounce his own sentence—thet air ther upshot o' hit. We-uns hes ther dead wood on ther cuss es it air. He can't stop us in that, noways."

"Jist so. Then ef he don't want ter git stopped hisself, he'll find it a heap ther healthiest not ter be penetratin' no disguises."

"Yer wouldn't slit his wind-pipe, would yer, Pard Pink?"

"Not lessen he wants hit did fer him mighty bad. Ther hain't no danger, I don't reckon, but durned ef I keer much. Ef this hyer Mister Endicott sh'd begin to see through our leetle game, I'll take keer he stays in ther room o' bis'n an' don't make no disturbance 'bout ther Menger ontil we-uns is right smart outer town."

"Then he kin foller or not jist es he durn pleases."

"I sees yer," was the pleased remark of Butternut Ben.

"Perzactly, pard. But yer doesn't go me one better I don't reckon," said Pink.

"Howsomever," continued Ben, "we-uns mought es well, seein' es my twilight air completed, waltz round ter ther Menger House an' sen' up our keerds ter our distinguished paytron."

"Keerect," was Prairie Pink's reply; and the pards set out without any more words to try the success of their counterplot.

They were soon in the presence of Mr. Endicott, who greeted Prairie Pink warmly, acknowledged the introduction to Cactus Kit graciously, and evidently without a shadow of suspicion that he had ever before set eyes upon the two borderers. Having invited the two scouts to refresh themselves with a really superior brand of Bourbon which stood on the dressing-table, their host at once proceeded to business.

"Our friend Mr. Pinkston has told you, I presume," he began, addressing Cactus Kit, "of the plan we have agreed upon—a harmless little trick you know, upon an emigrant train—due to-morrow in this city?"

"Ya-as," was the response; "Pard Pink hes bin spittin' out right smart o' chin-music but I hain't dead sure thet I hes got a clos't grip onto his meanin' till yit."

"You see," said Endicott; "the project doesn't involve any injury to any one. You—as Indians, you know, are not required to do any deed of violence further than is necessary to securing the person of the young lady."

"She is the sole object of the attack, and no harm is intended to her. I am willing to pay well for the work, and I believe I can trust that you and your pard will see that it is duly performed."

"Whatsomever Pard Pink 'grees onter," replied Ben, "air gospill duty with ole Cactus Kit. We-uns hes bin pards long 'nough ter make us most like husban' and ole 'oman thet-away."

"I never hedn't no wife, an' no more hedn't Pink, but, I don't reckon ef ary one on us hed, she'd ha' stuck ter her pardner more faithfuller nor we hes. All ther same, weemin does stick sometimes wosser'n poor relations."

"Yes; hanged if they don't," muttered Endicott.

"Thar's one p'int," here put in Prairie Pink, as the idea had just struck him, and he was desirous of having his mind set at rest in regard to it. "Hit air this-a-way. We-uns, in our 'sumed Injun karakter air runnin' a risk, ter a sartain extent, in lightin' down in ther way we contemplates 'pon these pilgrims."

"Then we runs right smart more o' a risk arter ther captur' o' ther piece o' caliker, when hit comes ter thet."

"In what way?" asked Endicott.

"Jist as easy. When yer comes down onter us, es we-uns is makin' our way ter camp, es hit war, thar's whar ther rail danger comes in."

"I don't understand you."

"Hit stan's ter reason—I'll leave hit ter you, Pard Kit, ef it don't—that a human, on sich a airend o' mercy es reskyin' a captered maidin', air dead sure ter be on ther safe side in ther fight."

"Oh, that's it," said Endicott, looking decidedly pleased at the implied compliment.

"Prezactly," responded Pink. "So ridin' down onter we-uns in thet air kinder ram-bunctious way, hit 'u'd be ther lierblest thing in ther world thet yer would, without mebbe so intendin' hit, plug me an' my pard, while we war gittin' up an' gittin' wi' ther gal."

"Hit comes nat'ral ter a human ter be on ther shute when he sees a Injun; an' I s'u'dn't rightly lay hit up again' yer, ef yer did it on-knowin', so ter speak. So I ventures ter put in a word that mought mebbe so 'fluence yer—"

"Oh, you can depend on my coolness," was the complacent reply. "I'll bear in mind all the circumstances, and cultivate a real friendly feeling for all warlike Indians, for the next twenty-four hours at least."

"I feels a heap easier in my mind," answered Pink, with a sigh of relief.

"A right smart heap," echoed his pard.

"To make assurance doubly sure," said the conceited villain, who began to think that he must be a very formidable fellow, "I'll agree to put no bullets in my weapons whatever. I shall have the appearance of being armed to the teeth, you know, and all that to give you a proper scare, as in duty bound; but there will be no danger, I pledge my word and honor."

The scouts contrived to look at this pacific assurance of the "tenderfoot," as if they had suddenly secured a new lease of life.

Pleased with the impression that he had made, and desirous of following it up while the iron was hot, Endicott having given them, as he believed they considered it, a sample of his magnanimity, bethought him now of enacting the role of a generous prince among his henchmen.

Pulling out a handful of gold eagles, he bestowed them upon the two men, adding:

"Make yourselves comfortable, my friends, until it is time to start on our enterprise, and once through with it successfully, you can rely on the balance of your reward as certain."

"The game's our own," said Prairie Pink, when the two scouts had gained the street. "An' thet air all ther funder reward thet we need keer fer er 'spect, Pard Kit."

"He air a bigger double an' twisted fool," exclaimed Butternut Ben, "nor I took him fer. I never hed more ter do in my life ter keep from snickerin' out, nor I hed when yer stuffed him with all thet 'bout his extr'o'dinary pluck an' vim; an' ter see ther way ther cuss swallered hit."

"Hit done him good, pard; a power o' good. An' hit sot ther kiote thinkin' o' hisself so dog-goned much thet he can't never git time nor room ter suspicion we-uns."

"Durned ef thet ain't so," said Ben. "But look a-yere, Pard Pink, what war yer objec' in gittin' ther cussed kiote ter promise not ter load his weepins? We-uns wa'n't a-carin'."

"Somebody else mought, don't yer see. Hit's past tellin' who he mought rush ag'in' in his disappointment when ther time comes, an' I didn't want him ter load up, for he mought plug ary human he comes acrost."

"Wa-al, drag me ter ther bone-yard, if he mought not, pard, so you was wisdom from 'way back."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE WAY.

THE journey of Dolly Davenant through the wilderness promised for some time after the start to be devoid of much interest, and this, notwithstanding the fact that the other lady members of the party were by no means disposed to let time hang heavy on their hands.

Mrs. and the Misses Bilberry were, as Dolly was not slow in discovering, characters in their way, and their conversation would at any other time have been amusing to their traveling companion in the highest degree. As it was, it served to relieve the monotony of the trip, to say the least of it.

"Thar's two things," remarked Marm Bilberry, "thet most reconciles me ter pullin' up stakes ther way we hes, an' leavin' a civerlized an' Christyin kentry fer ther front tiers. Hit air this: Fu'stly, them or'nary pa'r o' boys, an' they is jist too or'nary ter talk about, they'll find somethin' ter do, I reckon, 'sides layin' an' loungin' roun' an' imitatin' thar elders an' betters in drinkin' an' smokin'. Hit's a Scriptur' fact!"

Then, after a moment's silence, she continued:

"T'other air, 'bout ther gals."

"Now, maw!" expostulated both the young ladies, in chorus.

"Thar wa'n't no show fer their settlin' fur es I ever c'd see, long es we staid in Alerbam', though goodness knows, they seemed ter try thr purtiest on ther fellers. Twa'n't no fault o' tharn."

"Now, maw, you just hush yer mouth!"

ordered Miss Nancy Ann Jane with considerable vehemence.

The old lady went on, however, without appearing to notice this little interruption often heard before.

"They didn't hev much ter use thar arts on, I is 'bleeged ter say," admitted their mother, as a compromise. "Nancy Ann Jane es yer kin see is rather hard-favored an' much he-dn't orter be 'spected from her."

"I just think you'd better shet up, maw," suggested that young lady, indignantly.

"An' so seein' she couldn't 'complish much she sot tew stop Bets from gittin' her sheer. Them as wouldn't hev her, she war morally bound shouldn't hev Bets; an' I will say I gloried in her spunk arter all."

"Tain't true, though," was the not over polite remark of the young damsel referred to.

"Hit air ther Gospel truth," said her maternal, not disconcerted in the least by this calling of her veracity into question; "I could had had Betsy offen my han's more'n onc't, I reckon, ef't hadn't ha' bin fer Nance's crankiness an' cussedness."

"Not that I war carin' no great," she admitted; "seein' thar warn't no burry. She's young, Bets is, an' thar's heaps o' time; but I don't want both my da'ters left outter my han's an' 'pears like Nancy Ann Jane air gwine ter ter stick like lasses candy."

"You jist bet yer bonnet-strings I ain't," put in that enterprising young miss.

"Wa-al, es I war a-sayin'," continued Marm Bilberry, addressing herself still to Dolly, "I hopes thar'll be a show fer yer whar we're gwine. Hit kinder reconciles me in a measure ter ther good Lord's will."

"Anyways, I's boun' that Betsy shill hev her chance from this out every time. One old maid's 'nough in a family."

"I think yer hed better wait, ole woman," said the young lady thus stigmatized, "ontil yer hes one ter grumble at. True enough, I reckon. Yer needn't ter borry trouble."

"I hain't," replied her mother, "but I jist gi'ns yer f'r warning. Onc't we gits feelin' ter home ag'in, an' thar beaux gits ter comin' round, an' I sees that Bets air likes ter hev her full sheer, I'll take keer she hain't deprived of 'em."

"Ef I sees yer up to yer ole tic-tacs, an' makin' no headway nother, I'll gi'n it out, thet yer is a ole maid, an' thet yer paw an' me hain't no bankin' on yer settlin', an' thet seein' you is ter be a kinder stickin'-plaster, we is willin', so ter spe'k, ter part with Betsy."

"Well, I be durned!" exclaimed the elder Miss Bilberry completely taken aback, at hearing this resolution of her mother's.

"I ain't in no hurry," remarked the younger, with a self-satisfied smirk; "I reckon I kin 'ford ter wait."

"So yer kin, Bets," agreed the old lady; "but yer can't 'ford ter be swindled. Leastways we can't 'ford ter set still and see yer swindled. Yer kin count on yer maw every time. Yer sister hed her chance and she didn't bag no game."

The young lady addressed began to giggle; but her elder sister was apparently not affected in the same way. On the contrary, she turned upon the fair Betsy reprovingly:

"I wouldn't be a durn fool, Bets Bilberry, ef I hedn't any sense!"

"Miss Davenant," drawled out Marm Bilberry, "has yer any sister older'n yerself?"

"I have never had a sister," answered Dolly.

"Hit's cur'ous," commented the mater familias.

"What is curious, Mrs. Bilberry?"

"Thet yer hain't picked up no ole man till yit. I hes knowed right smart o' people wuss lookin' nor you what foun' husban's, an' whar you was raised, I hes hearn ther's heaps o' fellers."

Dolly smiled, and the old lady at once jumped at the conclusion that there was some one even now sorrowing for the fair face so far away from him.

"Wa-al," she added, consolingly, "ef he still keeps a-bankerin' arter ye, he's dead sure ter foller. Yer needn't ter think thet he'll be disencouraged by the steamboatin' an' pesky railroadin', ter say nothin' o' this yere or'nary wagin' what he'll hev ter go through with. He kin stan' it es well es you kin."

The suggestion of the garrulous old ignoramus brought vividly before Dolly the one whom she was indeed fleeing from, and the look of fright on her face at the bare thought of Endicott's being in search of her was misconstrued by the senseless old chatterer who gabbled on:

"Hit's right down lucky for a gal when she gits a feller so besot ter git spliced that he'll nater'ly foller her from Dan to Beersheby, es ther Gospel says."

"I'm sho' I wish yer luck. Ef I c'u'd say es much fer one o' my gals, hit 'u'd brace me up right peart; but thar ain't no one fur es I know in Alabam' what hes git up an' git 'nough 'bout him to foller one o' my da'ters, ef he keered ever so much 'bout her, which I don't reckon nobody does."

"Thet's all you know 'bout it," said Nancy Ann Jane, contemptuously.

"Wa-al," was the response, "seein's believ-

in'," an' when they 'roves in Texas, yer maw'll be convinced; but ontill then I doesn't 'spect ter hev nothin' but anxiety, lessen gals is sca'cer whar we is gwine an' fellers is easier caught."

As Marm Bilberry gave utterance to this piece of domestic philosophy, the guide Texas Thad rode up alongside the wagon and attracted the attention at once of the female head of the family. It had not occurred to the good lady until this moment that Mr. Bronson might be as good an authority on the subject that lay nearest her heart as he seemed to be on everything else in the land of promise to which they were journeying.

The opportunity was too good to be lost; and now that Marm Bilberry was on the subject of her greatest mental trials she hastened to improve it. Naturally she began her catechism with:

"Ever had a wife, Mister Thad of Texas?"

"Nary time," was the decided reply.

"Then ye hain't no darters, I don't reckon?"

"Naturally not," said the scout.

"Cur'ous," said the old lady, though what there was that was curious in the fact as Thad stated it, would probably have puzzled even her to explain. It did not however disconcert her any way, and she returned to the charge.

"Heaps o' young men out that-a-way I've hearn tell," she continued.

"Dead oodles on 'em," was the encouraging piece of information given by Texas Thad.

The inane smoke-dried face of Marm Bilberry absolutely brightened at this rather obscure reply, for what "dead oodles" meant she did not know, but guessed it was Texas for plenty.

"What is they like mostly?" was the next question.

"Like folks, es a gin'el thing; though some on 'em is more so nor the balance."

"Cur'ous," she again remarked. Then came:

"They mos' giner'ly marries, I reckon?"

"When they doesn't," said the scout, "they goes hit alone. That's what I've obsarved, marm."

"An' thar hain't so many gals thar es fellers?"

"Not by a jug full," said Thad.

Here was hope—the very personification of it—the anchor itself to Marm Bilberry.

"So gals mos'ly marries out thar?"

"When they kin," was the cautious answer.

"An' when they can't I suppose," said the anxious mother, with a look at her eldest daughter, "they jist hes ter grin an' b'ar it."

"No, marm," said the scout, "they needn't ter."

"Laws a massy, Mister Thad! What else kin the pore misfortinit creeturs do?"

"Wa-al, thar's the Injuns," he kindly suggested.

"So I've hearn," said the old lady a little apprehensively. "But they ain't no 'count, leastways not on this p'int."

"They 'pears ter be ther last chance fer ther ferlorn hopes, marm, fer all thet."

"Massy's sake! How on 'arth is that?"

"Wa-al, yer see, Marm Bilberry," said the old man, his face looking, if possible, blanker and less sympathetic than ever. "When a gal out in West Texas 'gins ter see thet her day o' grace hes passed, she sets herself out ter be capter'd."

"Good land!"

"Jis so. Tooken by the Injuns?"

"Durned ef I will!" exclaimed Nancy Ann Jane.

Her mother was silenced for the time being. Then she burst out:

"I'd rather a heap hev my d'aters on my han's forever an' eternally nor hev 'em captivated by Injuns."

Clearly Mrs. Bilberry was not wholly worldly and mercenary, after all. Desirous as she appeared to be, above all earthly things, to have her daughters taken away from her, she had a limit of her own. She must draw the line somewhere, and she did draw it at the Indians and Nancy Ann Jane.

The keen eye of the old scout noticed that Miss Davenant had been disturbed by something more than the unnecessary chatter of the old magpie to which she was compelled to listen, and he hastened without asking questions to speak words of cheer in regard to their journey and its probable termination.

"We air gittin' erlong in right good time, Miss Davenant, and I hopes you isn't feelin' quite done up by the travelin', seein' es yer hain't bin much used ter this style o' gittin' about."

"Oh, no, indeed," was the reply of the young lady, "not nearly so much as I had feared I would be. I rather enjoy it."

"Hit seems mos' likly 'bout now," said Thad, "thet we-uns 'll sight San Antonio airly tomorrow night."

"Oh, do you think so?"

Dolly was not certain whether she felt glad or sorry. The scout noticed it.

"Yer'll like San Antone, I opines," he hastened to say.

"I hope so," said Dolly quietly.

"Yer spoke back Injinoly ways, 'bout havin' secured yer quarters thar, 'fore yer left York. I reckon thet'll be all right now?"

Texas Thad put this last in the form of a question.

"Oh yes, thank you! I think—indeed I am sure it will be."

"Jist so. But es yer is erlong, an' hit was mighty different when yer made ther 'rangement, hit kinder 'curs ter me thet yer mought feel mebbe so, a little lonesome et ther fu'st, an' unpertected like," Thad ventured to say.

Dolly made no answer but it was evident that the old friend guessed rightly.

"Yer don't 'spect ter meet no 'quaintance, I thinks yer tole me?"

"No one. I am sure—I hope," she said hastily, "that is, I shall meet no one I know."

It was plain that the poor girl looked forward with dread to some possible annoyance awaiting her on her arrival in San Antonio.

"Ef it warn't takin' too much liberty—but I doesn't think mostly yer'd put hit ter thet on my part," began Thad hesitating.

"Oh no," said Dolly; "not that, you may be sure! You have been so kind from the first."

"What I war tryin' ter git through my head," continued the old scout, "war 'bout this. I knows ther offercers thar what hes wives—an' fu'st class female weemin they is, no discount on 'em what-somever—an' ef I jist speaks o' bow yer siterwat-ed, I knows that ther army folkses, weemin included, will be proud ter treat yer like one o' themselves."

"So yer sees, Miss Davenant, yer can't be erlong or unpertected never in San Antone."

The change in Dolly's face as he said this convinced Texas Thad that he had anticipated her one concern.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DRAWING NEARER.

VIVIAN FAIRFAX had fully calculated when he secured his guide and horses that he would overtake the wagon-train for San Antonio within the next twenty-four hours. But as ever, man proposes, only an unavoidable delay, extending over that time, served to increase the young man's suspense and impatience to an almost harrowing degree.

He had quite persuaded himself that the individual with whom Miss Davenant had left so suddenly and so strangely was none other than the man for whom he had waited and whom for some reasons unknown to him, the young lady had seemed to fear; therefore his motives in seeking to follow him up now that he believed he had struck his trail were two-fold. Vivian had his own injuries, the wrongs of his loved and only sister to redress; and had besides the duty pressing upon him to protect a young and friendless maiden from the arts of one, whom, whatever her opinion of him might be, he knew to be an unprincipled scoundrel.

It might reasonably be doubted if young Fairfax would have felt as strongly impelled to the latter course—namely, that of constituting himself the knight errant of an unprotected young lady traveling among strangers—had it not been for the fact that he had seen and conversed with her, and thus had all of his inherent chivalry aroused. In a word, Vivian was hopelessly in love.

Thus doubly armed and instigated, prompted by the two strongest of human passions, it was hardly possible, he argued, that Endicott could escape him. How the wretch had succeeded in keeping out of his way in Indianola—for Vivian was firmly convinced that his enemy had been there, secured an interview with Dolly, and in some inexplicable manner gained sufficient influence over her to induce her to set out with him—how all this had been accomplished without his knowing or suspecting aught of Endicott's presence, was a mystery that was yet to be solved.

Our young friend, as we know, had jumped somewhat hastily at conclusions. Had Marm Carraway been favored with but a glimpse of the "pilgrim" who had spirited away Miss Davenant in so unceremonious a manner, and thus been able to give Vivian a synopsis of the old scout's make-up, it is a question which of the two passions which now urged the young man forward would have been the stronger.

On the one hand, love would have prompted him to follow in any event; on the other, revenge, up to this time the ruling passion of his life, would have called upon him to remain where he was, and meet the villain for whom he had been so long in search.

As it was, however, the call was too strong to be disobeyed, no matter what there might have been that would dissuade him from it. And there was nothing. For the first time since the shadow had fallen on the threshold of his proud ancestral home, Vivian Fairfax felt that retribution was at hand.

The wretch who had clouded the last days of the fondest of fathers, who had deceived and ruined the life of an only daughter and sister, who had darkened his own young life, and had come so near making him a biter of his kind, was at last almost within his grasp. Endicott could no longer elude the vengeance of the man he had wronged.

"She cannot care for him," he said to himself, alluding to Dolly Davenant; "it is impossible that she should. I am positive that she dislikes him; that for some reason, she even fears him. And yet it seems she has left, ap-

parently without hesitation or remonstrance, in the villain's company!

"What influence is it that Endicott possesses, what strange magnet power? And why is it that this mysterious strength of will seems to exist only among the vile and unprincipled? Miss Davenant, I am persuaded, would never of her own free will have accompanied that scoundrel—would never willingly have met him. Whatever she knew of James Endicott, be it much or little, must have been to his disadvantage. And, so help me high Heaven! she shall know all there is to be told ere many days have passed!"

While the Bilberry party led by Texas Thad, and accompanied by Dolores Davenant were slowly nearing the Alamo City, and Vivian Fairfax was, at last setting out impatiently on their trail, two more parties were making ready in San Antonio to meet them.

The first of these starting in advance of the other—though this part of the programme was carried out in secret and entirely unsuspected—consisted of our friend Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink; ostensibly in the employ of James Endicott and supposed to be enacting the part of a pair of Indian hostiles for the furtherance of his diabolical scheme, they were yet the planners of a plot deeper than that of the man they pretended to serve.

Nothing however was further from the minds of the brave scouts than this aiding the villain Endicott. They were setting out having some hours the start not only of Endicott but of the counter-plotters whose project Pink had discovered; and their sole purpose was to ride out and meet the immigrants going simply in their own character to caution them in regard to the danger that was before them, and if necessary to join the party for the remainder of the journey.

"I don't reckon," said Ben, "thet ther pilgrims 'll mebbe need much backin' from what you hes see'd o' ther helyuns what 'tends ter buck ag'in 'em. Them two dog-goned Greasers don't count much an' ther durned card-sharp Max, air a leetle more so. The cussed parrarer pirate Quevedo—an' drag me ter ther bone-yard, but bit gits me ter think o' thet high-toned cuss bein' ther cap'n o' ther Frio Foxes!—air 'bout ther onliest 'pology fer a man in ther hull outfit. Ef ther pilgrims can't lay out sich a or'nary four humans as thet, they must be ther tenderest kind o' tenderfeet, dog'd ef they mustn't!"

"Same time, pard, ef yer opines thet they mought need a extry COLT er two, an' a few blue whistlers I air ready ter volunteer. Ther only difficulty air, bit mought be crowdin' things a leetle."

"Time enough," answered Pink, "ter settle thet air when we-uns sees what the'r caliber 'mounts ter."

"Some o' these yere trains might as well be a gals' bo'din' school, fer all ther sand they hes aboard. Then yer sees, pard, they hes this crowd, o' kaliker-kivered humans erlong, an' they is boun' ter take skeer et ther fu'st shot an' make more durn fuss nor a batch o' settin' hens. That sorter t'ing allers demoralizes a man when thar's any fightin' ter be did, an' hit seems like thar hain't more'n two thet's square on ther shute, an' one o' them's a nigger; fer ther two young roosters I don't reckon is more'n sproutin' thar tail feathers, an' can't be relied on in a 'mergency noways."

"Hit looks, Pard Pink, like they mought git salerwated arter all," remarked Ben.

"They mought," was the reply, "but yer see they won't, not much. One't me an' you reaches ther outfit, an' takes thar measure, we kin calkerlate accordin'; an' what they needs in ther way o' backin', we-uns is mor'ly boun' ter s'ply 'em with."

"To be sart'inly," said Butternut Ben.

"An' come ter think o' hit," resumed his pard. "I reckon hit air our best play, no matter how ther keerds runs. This yere condemned kiote Quevedo air a slippery cuss, an' we wauts ter nab ther varmint; leastways ter git him kerral'd so thar won't be no chance o' his 'scapin' an' suttin' up ag'in somewhar es ther grand hidalgo from 'crost ther Grandee."

"I swan ter my granny, I done thought ther Foxes had all been smoked out twelve moons ago, an' ter think thet cap'n hisself hes bin holdin' out all this time in San Antonio, an' puttin' on more frills than the'r Ole Boy, r'iles me mightily; dog'd ef hit don't."

"Thet little game o' his'n hes got ter be stop-ped right thar; an' now't I hes got my peepers on ther locate of ther sneakin' cusses, I reckon hit won't take many days ter settle thar hash. Hit's ther fu'st time in I don't know when, thet I diskivered more on a lone scout nor I'd see'd sign fer."

"Wa-al," chimed in Butternut Ben, "ther job hit 'pears air a double-breasted one so to speak."

"We hes ter sarcumvint this skunk Endicott an' we hes ter eucher ther Foxes outen thar leetle game, 'sides nabbin' ther cusses, er leastways runnin' them inter thar holes."

"Prezactly," assented Prairie Pink.

At the time the two scouts were starting to meet the wagon-train the Captain of the Frio

Foxes was conferring with his adherents in regard to what they all agreed in considering the easy job that they had before them. No second meeting had taken place between Quevedo and the two outlaws in the Menger. He was too shrewd for that. No suspicion must be allowed to fall upon any act of his in San Antonio. Nothing must be permitted that could in any way militate against the character and position of the wealthy Castilian ranchero from the Rio Grande.

El Captain accompanied by his chief fogle man and bottle-holder Monte Max, had ridden out to a rendezvous, a short distance from the city which had been agreed upon by the four for their future meetings. At such times as Quevedo met the two Greasers about town, no recognition on his part, or at most a very patronizing one, was accorded them.

Their place of meeting was in a clump of chaparral, inclosing a small opening densely shaded on all sides and having but one narrow footpath leading to it; so that it was not necessary to place any one on guard while they were holding their secret consultations as the eye could readily command a view of the only approach.

"That this party of immigrants have considerable money and valuables with them," the bandit chief way saying, "I have no doubt from the information that has reached me—"

Quevedo knew nothing whatever in regard to this, but it was above all things necessary that his son should be made to believe this, hence he did not hesitate to give the needed assurance.

He then went on to say, generously:

"All that, my men, I leave to you, as I happen to be more concerned with the capture of the young lady. Now I do not intend that my followers shall share in the gold which I feel confident her ransom will bring us. But that is something to be considered later. This Endicott has money, I have no doubt; and if he has not, it is all right anyway."

"But how all right, captain, if the Gringo has not the gold?" asked one of the outlaws.

"Either he or the senorita has it," was the reply.

"And what then?" inquired Jose.

"What then?" repeated Quevedo. "Don't you see that the ransom is sure in any case? And what does it matter who pays it, so long as the eagles come in to the Foxes? I shall take care that the senorita, once she is in our clutches, goes only to the highest bidder. She may have friends who will be willing to go Senor Endicott one better."

Monte Max laughed.

"I had not thought of that, El Capitan," he said.

Quevedo looked serenely contemptuous.

"I do the thinking for my band," he replied, in his loftiest manner.

"Well," remarked Juan, "there does not seem to be any difficulty in the business, El Capitan. We ride out to-night, getting the start of these two braves of the Bexar tribe, secure our game, and then, I suppose, if we feel like it, remain long enough to give the imitation warriors a first-class scare."

"There will be no danger in that, I fancy."

"Just as you like about that," said Quevedo, carelessly; "only let me get away with the senorita, and you can amuse yourself with what remains in your own way, always remembering, however, to be on the alert. It will not do to have the presence of the Foxes even suspected in the vicinity of San Antonio."

This was arranged by the second of the parties, instigated by Endicott, the second plan to frustrate that far-seeing gentleman in his designs.

At the very time that the bandit chief and his men were on their way to meet the coming train, the chief plotter was preparing to set out from the Menger in warlike array, but, as he had arranged it with Prairie Pink, without ammunition, to make his great *coup d'etat* in the rescue of Dolly Davenant from her Indian captors.

Strange to say, at this moment, when he felt that success was virtually his, James Endicott was visited by the first semblance of a conscientious scruple that had troubled him in years.

It must have been that the love with which Dolly Davenant had inspired him was the most powerful feeling of which his depraved nature was capable.

"There is one thing," he soliloquized, "which I am not sure, after all, that I am able to do."

"Can I wed Dolly—for my wife she must be—without telling her everything? I mean of course in regard to Rose—that affair of Dare's she must never be allowed to suspect."

"But how can I do such a thing? If I confess to Dolly Davenant what I am, and I have done, all hope will be over for me at once. How could I hope to make her my wife, with the knowledge that another has a claim to that title?"

"No, she must learn to love me, as I know she will first out of gratitude; and loving me she must also respect me. Besides, where is the use of half-confidence with her? I cannot tell her everything and I will tell her nothing. I was mad even to think of it."

"Rose will never claim me as a husband. I am sure of that. Her one great desire is to remain unknown—to be only Miss St. Evremont, and that will keep her mouth sealed."

"No, I have nothing to fear. Rosalind will never rise up in judgment against me in this world as my wife, so I will consider that secret as a buried one."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PARDS ON THE TRAIL.

HAVING arranged all their plans to their own satisfaction, to thwart the plot of James Endicott and those who were also making a tool of him, Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink set out upon the trail that was to have an eventful ending for more than one person.

The two men, as I have said, were thorough plainsmen, and they knew the prairies and wilds of Texas as they did their mother's face.

They had entered upon the plot against Endicott, and to save Dolores Davenant, and they meant to hold on like grim death until the end was reached, be that end what it might.

The scouts appointed a spot where the train was to be headed off by their pretended attack, and as James Endicott knew next to nothing about finding his way on a trail, they were to take him with them to a certain point, there to await the opportune moment when he was to dash out and pretend to rescue Dolly from the enemy, thereby gaining favor in her eyes.

He had made up, in his own mind, his story to account for his presence there, how he had boldly ventured out alone on the trail to San Antonio, and seeing the two prowling horsemen, had kept his eye upon them, and fortunately had thus been enabled to save her from a fearful fate.

Having given Endicott all the necessary instructions for his mock rescue, the two Prairie Pards, Butternut Ben and Pink, set out to accomplish the double work they had cut out for themselves.

Their plan was to strike the trail and warn Major Bilberry of danger, thus placing him on the alert, for not the remotest idea had they that their pard, Texas Thad, was along.

Had they known this fact, their anxiety about the fate of Dolores Davenant would have been very slight.

They knew that Quevedo and his companions, Monte Max, Jose and Juan, would expect to have matters all their own way, and they congratulated themselves upon the surprise they would give them when the attack would be made.

As for James Endicott, Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink cared but little.

His punishment, if any, must come later on; but Quevedo and his gang were the ones to be looked to first.

Quevedo, as the Captain of the Foxes of the Frio, already had a price upon his head.

He was "wanted" in both Texas and Mexico for crimes committed, and so far he had eluded all attempts to discover who and what he was, and just where he made his abiding place.

His band had been driven from point to point, and none of their retreats had long remained undiscovered; but through all the daring and mysterious El Capitan remained unknown, and not a person was there to say that he had ever seen him.

But at last the secret was known to Prairie Pink and Butternut Ben.

It was with matters arranged to their liking, that they rode out of San Antonio one night, and their comrade was the man, who, believing them his hirelings, was in reality no more than their decoy.

They knew perfectly the trail that the train was following, and their first duty was to find just where it then was.

Then they had to pick out a spot suitable for James Endicott's little plan of a preterded rescue of Dolores Davenant, and place him in position.

Then they were to leave him and secretly warn Major Bilberry of how matters stood and await developments.

So out upon the trail rode the three men, and the train was soon discovered, the situations for the coming acts located, and then Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink were left to themselves to consummate their well-formed plot in their own way.

They had received their first installment of "pay" from their decoy, James Endicott, so were amply repaid for their services in the good cause, though they would gladly have acted without the slightest recompense whatever.

They considered that they had a right to take a villain's gold in carrying out a good end, and so they were contented with how matters stood.

And out upon the trail of the wagon-train of the Bilberys started Quevedo and his men.

They had the same one in view, viz. Dolores Davenant, that James Endicott had; but then they were alone looking for gold in the end.

Monte Max acted for gold, and El Capitan expected to make Endicott pay a handsome ransom for the giving up to him of Dolores Davenant, while Jose and Juan certainly anticipated sharing in the booty found with the wagon-train.

And coming in the rear of the train, following

its trail faithfully, was Vivian Fairfax, determined to find the woman whom he now confessed that he loved, slight as had been his acquaintance with her.

But also in his heart burned the other passions of hatred and revenge against the man whom he regarded as the destroyer of his sister's happiness, and whose act against her had brought deepest sorrow upon his father and himself and tarnished their honorable name with a stain of dishonor.

Thus were the various characters in this story, their steps guided by a strange destiny, shaping their different ways toward a certain end.

They were all upon the trail, guided by separate motives, and fate was their guide to their destination.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FIRST ALARM.

"THIS is wild life indeed," exclaimed Dolly Davenant, looking around her on every side, after having withdrawn her gaze from the gorgeous sunset, on which it had been fixed for some minutes previous.

They had camped for the night. Ere another one should close upon them they hoped to be in the Alamo City.

"Wild life, indeed," she repeated; "but I like it! God made the country—so some one has said—and man made the town. But the towns, full of property as well as wealth, full of crimes as well as virtues, are far behind us. We are out here, where the great Creator can be seen in all his marvelous and beautiful waters, the rustling leaves and the whispering winds. His praise is sung by bird and insect alike. His smile is visible on every glittering leaf and radiant flower. Surely, this beautiful land ought to be Holy Ground!"

"Another day, Thad tells us, we shall be in San Antonio; to see another town will be at best to view what man has been able to accomplish, in marring a great and all-perfect design of nature, in bringing once more chaos into a world which had been pronounced in the beginning good.

"But, this is ungrateful of me. I should and I must regard this little Spanish-American city, so quaint they tell me, and so pretty, as a haven of rest, as a place where I can feel secure at least for a time from the persecution which I cannot but dread.

"And yet as I look around me now, I cannot refrain from wishing that it were possible here to pitch one's tent and to wait patiently and thankfully for the end. Had I my own wish, I would proceed no further."

"No funder?" exclaimed Marm Bilberry. Dolly had unconsciously uttered the last words aloud.

"Wa-al I be switched!" ejaculated the old lady, "ef thet ain't ther beatinest I hes hearn till yit! Don't want ter go no funder, ye hear that, gals?"

The "gals" heard it now, at all events; as, in fact, did every one else in the party.

"Who ain't gwine no funder?" inquired Betsy.

"Nobuddy," said her mother.

"Then what ye ravin' 'bout?" asked the young lady.

This started the maternal Bilberry in another direction. Since leaving Indianola, that excellent woman had been so much occupied with her promising daughters and their guest that for a longer time than was usual with her she had given her husband, as he would have phrased it, a "rest."

Now, however, as the time approached when she was about to lose a good part of her audience, Marm Bilberry began to realize that she was in danger of getting out of practice, if she "let up" on her "ole man" entirely, so she resumed the attack on the old grounds.

"I hopes, Bill Bilberry," she began—and when the wife of his bosom addressed him as "Bill," and not "Major," that excellent man was aware that the grievance about to be complained of was a specially aggravated case.

"I hopes, Bill Bilberry, yer sees yer way."

"I spects ter in the mornin'," was the complacent answer. "Es 'tis, we-uns don't 'tend gwine no funder et ther present time."

This was quite too matter-of-fact to please his spouse, so she returned to the charge.

"Yer knows powerful well what I is 'ludin' at. An' when yer talks 'bout the mornin' I hopes yer'll know at sun-up more'n yer does now 'bout ther futur'."

"I reckon I shall," said the worthy major.

"An' how much yer knows now?" demanded his wife.

"I know I air tired, an' I'll be right glad when the coffee is biled, fer I needs strengthenin'."

"Yer'll need it a heep more, 'fore yer through," was the old lady's next observation.

"What fer? Ter stan' up under yer jawin'?"

"Who's a-jawin'? I want a-jawin'!" she responded, with much indignation.

"Course not. Yer war sayin' yer pra'rs."

Whether this retort would have remained unanswered none could say, for, before Marm Bilberry had time to collect herself for a fresh attack, Texas Thad noticed at some distance to

the west an object upon the horizon which had hitherto been unperceived. A minute more, there proved to be two objects in view and they were coming apparently toward them. It did not take long to decide that they were horsemen and the natural curiosity of Marm Bilberry was at once swallowed up in the apprehension which she professed to have had ever since leaving Alabama.

"Hit's Injuns!" she yelled almost triumphantly, at the thought that her gloomiest prediction wore "silverized togs," at least, and from the manner of their approach, he felt convinced that they were not only "white" but "square."

For all this there was no little excitement in the camp until the two horsemen rode up deliberately to the scout and to his great surprise hailed him by name.

"Wa-al, drag me ter ther bone-yard! Texas Thad, whar in thunder did yer light from, an' what yer doin' long o' this outfit?"

"Pard Thad!" called out the other, "ef yer c'u'dn't knock me down with a buzzard's eyewinker, I air ther boss liar o' Bear county. 'Es Ben says, what yer tryin' ter do this-a-way, an' whar you bin?"

"Reg'lar employed by ther major byer," was Thad's answer. "Gwine es fur es San Antone, an' mebbe so funder. Bin north ter ole York, an' come out, es Pard Ben hed orter know, on ther No'th Star 'long o' Captain Bill Barnacle. Light, pards, an' I'll gi'n yer a interduct ter ther hull outfit."

This, Texas Thad performed in good shape.

"Major Bilberry, these hyer two ole raw-hides air pards o' mine from San Antone, an' they's both white clean through an' no discount onter 'em. This yer air Butternut Ben, an' that thar one's handle air Prairie Pink.

"Pards, these hyer air Marm Bilberry an' her darters.

"Ther leetle gals air quite inter ther matrimonial biz, an' I reckon they kin git suited in West Texas lessen they is too dog-goned hard ter please.

"These yere young suckin' scouts air ambitious to git onto ther war-path, though takin' time ter see ther elephant in San Antone.

"We-uns must contrive ter gi'n any frien'ly 'Patches that wo knows on a word o' warnin'; fer hit don't seem a fa'r show ter hev ther red heaten in tha'r blindness, as ther spellin'-book says, exterminated ter onc't. Thet's Christyin doctrin', hain't it?"

"Every time," replied Prairie Pink. "Gi'n Mister Lo a fa'r show, ef he ain't a man an' a brother."

"But I hain't through, pards," said Thad, quietly returning to the introduction of his friends, "by no manner of means air I through with my interduct."

"We hes 'long o' us a young lady what comed out on ther No'th Star, an' hes hed a peck o' trouble. Yer knows whom I air 'ludin' et, pard Ben, though yer didn't never sot eyes onter her. We-uns won't disturb her jist yet, es she seems ter be medertatin'. Her brother war lost at sea, es yer has hearn, Ben, I reckon?"

Butternut Ben nodded.

"She war gittin' quite peart, appeariently in Injinoly," continued Thad, "when all on a sudden she seemed struck wi' ther idee that San Antone was ther place fer her; ye see, her an' her brother war 'tendin' ter make ther burg ther locate in ther fust place. I reckon ther leetle gal can't git some kind o' skeer outen her mind; an' bein' es thet air ther case, hit war ther right thing fer her to go thar."

"Hit war jist ther wrongest thing es it happens, ole pard," put in Prairie Pink.

"How yer makes thet out, Pard Pink?"

"Less take a sot," was the reply; and the negro having staked the horses of the two scouts, and Major Bilberry having joined them, they all sat down while supper was being prepared, and Thad and his old pard exchanged notes on the great question of which the former up to this time knew so little.

Butternut Ben gave the history of the Davenant family—at least all that he had been able to learn of it—and Endicott's connection with the same. He then told to Thad and the major, corroborated in every particular by Pink, the plot which Endicott had formed, and the agents he had employed.

The consternation of Major Bilberry on hearing that an attack was to be looked for at an early hour on the coming day, may be imagined: and especially was this the case when he learned that the attacking party formed part of a band of noted road-agents, and was led by the notorious El Capitan Quevedo. He wisely decided, however, not to speak of the matter to any one of his household, as it was quite important that all, and particularly Miss Davenant, should have a good night's rest.

Now that the two scouts had found their pard, Texas Thad, to be with the wagon-train, they had not the slightest apprehension in regard to the expected meeting on the morrow, and Thad and the major soon felt reassured.

The major's worthy better-half was, however, by no means pleased at being shut out from the interesting conversation, which, she felt, was going on.

It was difficult to make an excuse for intrud-

ing upon the masculine element before supper, but Marm Bilberry was fertile in resources.

As she edged her way around to where the four men were seated, hesitating as to the best manner of announcing herself, her quick ear was caught by a word or two, that had the effect upon her of a galvanic shock. Butternut Ben was going on with his narrative respecting Endicott:

"An' ter think," he was saying, "thet ther durned sneakin' kiote sh'd git up such a scheme outen his own brain-pan. And thet we-uns sh'd git up a Injun circus, an' light down onter ther train that-a-way. Two durn Injuns ter massacre ther hull dog-goned outfit—"

This last was all that Marm Bilberry caught, and it was enough for her, with all her previous fears already aroused. Darting back into the midst of her little flock, she gave a yell that would have startled the savages had they been really at hand.

"Injuns!" she cried. "My dar'ters will be captivated! Injuns! Oh, Moses, pectect us!"

CHAPTER XXX.

BUCK AND BUD "CHIP IN."

ALL were early astir in the Bilberry camp, and Marm Bilberry, her fears quieted on the Indian question, was as much on the alert as any member of the party.

It had been judged best by the scouts not to acquaint Miss Davenant with the connection of Endicott with the proposed attack on the train, as this would only needlessly add to her alarm. The young lady, therefore, being assured that the attacking party was in no way formidable, and being disturbed by no thought of her persecutor in the direction of San Antonio, was now the most cheerful one among them.

The suggestion of Texas Thad that they continue their journey, keeping constantly on the alert, was agreed to by his pards, as well as by Major Bilberry.

It was deemed the best strategy, however, that the scouts should keep a little in the rear, in order that not being perceived by El Capitan Quevedo and his Foxes, the latter might be thrown off their guard, and ride down abruptly upon the train.

"I reckon," said Butternut Ben, "ther cusses air lieble ter diskiver 'bout thet time that they is 'tactin' somethin' beyant a lone pilgrim with a passel o' female weemin an' a nigger. Ef ther Frio Foxes doesn't git most eternally salerwated, drag me ter ther bone-yard!"

"Shouldn't wonder, most likely," Prairie Pink remarked, "ef some one won't hev thet air Christiun duty ter perform fer ther Foxes, lessen ther wolves an' ther buzzards saves 'em ther trouble."

"Hit seems ter me, pards," observed Thad, "thet our best move air ter captur' El Capitan, pervidin' hit kin be did. Shootin' air too good fer ther ole fox. Ter be strung up air ther most nat'ral death in his case."

"Ther high-toned Hidalgo 'ud ornament a cottonwood limb," said Pink, "fer a fac'; but we-uns won't hev much time nor show I reckon ter study ther merely ornamental. Ther strictly useful air 'bout all we is lieble ter consarn ourselves with mostly."

"Sho enough they isn't no danger—yer garrantees that?" queried Marm Bilberry.

"Not 'lessen hit mought be thet you gut yerself runned off," replied her loving husband. "Thar's some danger o' thet, I hearn't ther leastest doubt, ef yer doesn't keep yerself ter yerself more'n you's in ther habit o' doin'."

"Ther road-agents doesn't git a show et sich a bonanza es you is every day o' the week."

"You be powerful mean, Bill Bilberry," was the only retort made by the old lady to this piece of sarcasm; but she was evidently more at ease in her own mind.

Buck and Bud, the male Bilberry scions, were unusually quiet; and a stranger might have thought, not a little apprehensive in regard to the coming fray. But this was scarcely the case. These youths had been impressed long before their father had been seized with the Texas fever, with the almost fabulous deeds of prairie adventure, which from time to time reached them in their secluded Alabama home; and a not unnatural desire to emulate them had taken possession of their youthful breasts.

Since setting out on their pilgrimage to the land of promise, the thought of a speedy realization of their youthful dreams had never been long absent from their minds; and the tales told by Texas Thad to while away the tedium of the journey had been to them as "apples of gold in pictures of silver."

The first intimation therefore from the two scouts, that an attack upon them by bandits was impending, fired all the war-horse spirit that might have come down to them from revolutionary days.

The Misses Bilberry, too, had a quiet consultation between themselves; the subject being even at this trying moment the one that lay nearest their virgin hearts.

Their apprehensions, like those of their mother, in regard to their being "captivated" by the Indians, having been quieted, the next thought was that, very possibly, there might be a danger of the same calamity at the hands of the outlaws.

But strange to say, the idea brought with it no fear in the bosoms of these brave daughters of the pine forests of Alabama.

Miss Davenant, though but little excited comparatively at the thought of the coming conflict, was nevertheless desirous of hearing more in regard to it from the scouts who had arrived the evening previous.

She therefore requested Texas Thad to introduce his two friends that she might learn exactly what they had to fear. It was with no little trepidation, however, that Ben and Pink came up to be presented to the young lady in whose fortunes they had taken so lively an interest.

"This is so kind of you both," said Dolly, with a smile that was peculiarly her own; "so kind to ride out in this way, and give us warning of this danger, as well as remaining to assist in protecting us."

"All thet air in our strict line o' biz, miss," was the reply of Butternut Ben, "an' 'sides when ther hell-desarvin' vilyun what planned this here 'tact, undertook ter git we-'uns ter act fer him, hit become a matter o' strict duty as hit war ter sareumwent him, an' thet air what we sot out ter do."

"And the man who is at the bottom of all this—who is he, and what?" inquired Dolly.

"A dubbil-dyed reperbate," answered Prairie Pink. "A bandit 'ud be a Christyun middle-aged hero compar'd ter him!"

"But," added Ben, "ther bandits 'bout hyer air trying now ter come in on ther hum stretch. They air ther piruts what we-'uns air layin' fer now. This yere condemned Quevedo an' ther Foxes o' ther Frio."

"A band of outlaws?" asked Dolly in some alarm.

"Yas, miss, they is outlaws clean through," was Pink's reply; "but we-'uns is dead sure ter wipe 'em out. Ther hain't nothin' ter git skeered at."

The scouts then fell into the rear and the wagon train proceeded as usual: the only man visible being Major Bilberry and his driver the faithful Cudge if we except the two boys, Buck and Bud, who would have been anything but happy had they supposed themselves not counted in such emergency.

The sun was shining down brightly upon the immigrants and the morning although in January might have easily passed for a representative one of June.

An hour or more was consumed in waiting, or more properly speaking in journeying slowly toward the climax, that was approaching when suddenly our friends found themselves ambushed.

Three men in masks—their leader for reasons of his own remaining in the back-ground—dashed out on the instant upon the wagon-train from a thick clump of chaparral.

The order to throw up their hands was at once obeyed, Major Bilberry and his family having received their instructions to that effect from the scouts, who intended in their turn to surprise the outlaws.

But while the three bandits were rapidly "going through" the train and before Texas Thad and his pards could ride up to the rescue, an unexpected diversion had taken place. Buck and Bud had their own ideas in regard to repelling an attack of road-agents and they were not disposed to let slip this their first opportunity for distinguishing themselves.

When everything had been arranged for awaiting the attack of the outlaws, these ambitious youths had quietly put up their revolvers among the plunder in the hindmost of the wagons and consequently were unarmed nominally at least, when the bandits dashed out upon them.

No sooner, however, were the latter busied in seeking for treasures on the train, than Buck gave the word, or rather the signal, to his brother.

On the instant the pistols were again in their hands, their aim taken, and before any member of either party was aware of their intentions, two flashes were succeeded by a simultaneous report.

As the scouts rode up, to their amazement, they saw two of the outlaws fall to the ground, and the third dash blindly back into the chaparral.

A moment's examination was sufficient to convince them that the aim of the two lads had been good, and their shots not wasted.

With a wild cry the scouts darted in pursuit of the retreating bandit, foolishly followed by the major and his two boys.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRAILS AND COUNTER-TRAILS.

THERE were different feelings in the hearts of both Monte Max and Quevedo, the chief of the Foxes of the Frio, regarding the capture of Dolly Davenant.

As has been said, the Creole was not wholly bad at heart. He was a gambler, and he had done many questionable acts in his life, but he did not wish to see James Endicott triumph over a poor girl, who, through his act, by allying himself with Quevedo, would be placed wholly in his power.

He knew enough of the robber chief to be aware that he was a bold, bad man, with no mercy in his heart for man or woman, and Endicott he also believed to be a merciless villain.

James Endicott, when under the influence of drink, and when the two were intimate, had dropped many words that led Monte Max to believe that Dolores was a victim of a deep plot, though all the reasons, therefor, the Creole had been unable to discover.

He knew that she must be very beautiful, from Endicott's description, that she was alone in the world, and would naturally need a friend to aid her against the plot against her.

Why should he not play a double role and save her from both Endicott and Quevedo?

He feared that, as soon as Quevedo had seen her, the susceptible Spaniard would fall in love with her, and, caring nothing for the hatred that she might feel for him, would force her to become his wife.

He did not for a moment doubt but that Quevedo would, after the capture of Dolores by him, restore her to Endicott.

But this would simply be to get the ransom which James Endicott would give for her.

Once he had the gold in his clutches, it would be easy enough for El Capitan to take her away from Endicott by force, or kidnap her if he preferred it.

Monte Max knew that the chief would not allow the life of Endicott to stand in his way for an instant, and if he could get the ransom money, and then recapture the maiden, he would do so only too gladly.

And right here did Monte Max make a virtuous resolve.

It was to the effect that he would become the champion of Dolores Davenant.

There was an idea in his mind that was perhaps the cause of his virtue in a measure, for he believed that the young lady was either an heirless to a large fortune, or, already held in her own right a sum of money that would admit of luxurious living for herself and her husband, when she got one.

The whys and wherefores of the case he did not enter upon in his own mind, as to her reasons for coming to Texas, and having no protector.

He would become that protector, he would make the game of James Endicott, to play the hero and secure Dolores, the foundation of his own plot, for he would save her from her foes.

He would save her from both Endicott and El Capitan the Chief of the Foxes of the Frio, and this would give him a claim upon her.

He would act the gentleman as well, be as kind as a brother, and allow her to see in him only one who would serve her.

He would make a quiet, yet decided siege of her heart and endeavor to win her gratitude first, her respect and then her love.

The sins he had been guilty of he would keep from her ears.

No one should approach her who would not say a good word for him, for he would see that they were well paid for so doing.

He would win her by his respect and kindness, and try in every way to make himself necessary to her happiness.

His reformation would be in giving up open gambling, for privately he would have to keep up and playing to make both ends meet.

Saving his money he would gain for himself a nice little sum on which to live and keep up appearances of being well off.

To Dolores he would be known only as a Creole, a young ranchero, who loved her devotedly and could give her a comfortable home.

Once she was his wife of course he would have control of the enormous fortune which he supposed to be hers, and they could go to other scenes and live in luxury and happiness, for he felt that if she proved all that his fancy painted her, then indeed his lot in life would be a happy one.

With such resolves it was, that Monte Max started forth upon the trail in company with El Capitan and his two robber allies.

There was work ahead to be done, and where James Endicott had his game to play, Quevedo had a plot to carry out for his own benefit, the two Mexicans their little plan to bring to a head for their interests, and he, Maximo Legere, alias Monte Max the card sharp, had the wheel within the wheel that was to turn out a fortune for him.

At least so he thought. When the trail of the wagon-train of Major Bilberry was struck, the party all congratulated themselves that all was going just as they wished it should go.

The idea that there might be obstacles in the way of their success never entered the minds of one of the plotters.

Endicott was happy in anticipation, Quevedo was content that he held trumps, Jose and Juan were satisfied that they would make capital for themselves by the arrangement, and Monte Max was radiant with hope that he held the key to the situation.

With only the old major, a negro man and the emigrant's sons, two mere boys, to deal with, how could matters, they thought, go other than they intended?

As is the custom with plotters of villainy,

they did not think that there might be other plotters as cunning as they to counterplot.

They did not know that Texas Thad, a man whom all wrong-doers greatly feared, was along with the train.

They did not know that Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink, two more honest Texas border-men to be feared by wicked men, had a hand in the quadrangular game to be played to a finish.

They did not know that Vivian Fairfax was also on the trail of the wagon-train, with every hope of his life for love and revenge fixed upon Dolores Davenant and James Endicott, whom he believed to be her companion.

They did not know that in the North were two others—Rose, the deceived wife, and Dare Davenant, the brother supposed to be dead—who held an interest in Texas just then.

And so matters shaped themselves, while the train journeyed on its wearisome way toward San Antonio, those that were nearing their destination all unconscious of the trails and counter-trails verging into their own, but not doomed to long remain in ignorance of the fact.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAPTURED.

SCARCELY had the scouts accompanied by Major Bilberry and his boys, disappeared in chase of the horseman who had fled after the fall of his two comrades when a little distance beyond, on the back trail, appeared from another thicket a fourth masked horseman who in a moment more was at the scene of action.

With a bitter curse he rode past the two prostrate men, and up to the front wagon in which sat Dolly Davenant pale and anxious, the terrified Marm Bilberry for once in her life speechless, and her two yet expectant daughters equally so.

The latter evidently believed that the crisis had at length come; and so indeed it had, but it was not materially to affect them.

Without so much as glancing at them, without deigning a look at the household goods of the Bilberrys, the outlaw seized the helpless Miss Davenant and lifting her to the saddle in front of him started off at headlong pace on the back trail.

When a little later the party who deserted the train to follow the fleeing bandit returned they saw the dead bodies of the two Mexicans Juan and Jose upon the sward, Marm Bilberry in real, or assumed hysterics, and her daughters the very picture of mingled alarm and disappointment. *Dolly was nowhere visible.*

Then they perceived what had been the strategic move of the bandit chief. Then they knew that Dolly Davenant was in the hands and the power of El Capitan Quevedo!

The bandit chief had laid his plans most thoroughly.

After the trail had been found, the ambush set and all ready for the attack, Quevedo had left Monte Max to carry out the onset, accompanied by his two men, Jose and Juan.

Should a fire be poured upon them he did not intend to take the chances of being killed.

He, El Capitan, had too much to live for, he thought, while they, Monte Max and the two Mexicans, were only of sufficient value in his eyes to carry out his commands.

Then he was determined to look himself to the kidnapping of Dolores Davenant.

So it was that when the three masked horsemen dashed upon the train, Quevedo held back, and, making a flank movement, rushed out upon the scene.

The great valor of Buck and Bud Bilberry had upset the calculations of all.

Having seen two of the three horsemen drop under their fire, they were carried away with enthusiasm and at once set off with their father and the scouts in pursuit of the third masked bandit.

It was thereby that Quevedo had the chance to make his dash upon the train, and, finding it wholly unprotected, he seized Dolores Davenant and rode rapidly away.

Dolores was unnerved by fear.

That is, she was in a dazed condition almost, and offered not the slightest resistance to being thus kidnapped.

Where either of the Bilberry maidens might have acted likewise, that is passively, their motive would have been from a desire not to thwart a bandit in carrying them off in such a romantic manner, for thereby the aim of their mother might be realized.

Having gone several miles from the scene in a canter which his splendid horse did not seem to feel in the least in spite of his double load, El Capitan drew rein and looked about him.

Dolores was silent and calm, but she shrunk from the supporting arm of the bandit chief as much as was possible.

Now, as he came to a halt, she said:

"As you seem determined to take me with you, may I not ride behind you to avoid the contact of your arm?"

"As you please, senorita, for I would not force my attention upon you."

"But I am your friend, not your foe," he said in his softest manner.

She could not see his face, for the mask securely concealed it, but she saw that his form was elegant, his attire rich, and his manners and voice were refined and gentle.

"I can understand no friendship that commences by your kidnapping me," she answered. "Ah! there is much for you to understand, for me to explain, *senorita*."

"Now let me say that you are perfectly safe in my hands, and when I feel that we are secure from attack, I will explain all to you."

"Will you ride behind me?" as you said.

"I prefer it, sir."

He placed her behind his saddle, throwing his *serape* over the back of the horse for a seat for her, and then mounting, rode away into the chaparral.

In silence he continued his way for miles, going at a fair pace, and taking many devious trails that penetrated the chaparral like a network.

Once or twice he stopped at a spring, and taking a silver cup from his saddle pocket, gave his captive a drink of cool water, which she seemed to enjoy.

Then he rode on once more, and when night came seemed at no loss to find his way, his course showing that he had some given point in view.

At last he passed through a dense chaparral, and the cries of the wild animals that his presence disturbed, caused the heart of Dolores to almost stand still with dread.

An hour after nightfall he rode up to a cabin and gave a hail.

The door opened softly, and a voice in broken English asked:

"Who is it?"

"El Capitan," was the reply.

"Ah! welcome, *senor*," and a man came forth from the cabin.

"Valas, I have a lady here who is my guest."

"Her train was attacked upon the trail, and I rescued her and she will remain here until her friends claim her."

"Yes, *senor*."

"Where is your wife?"

"Within doors, *senor*."

"Bid her see to this lady's comfort in all things."

"I am here, *senor*, and have heard your words, so will obey," said a woman just then appearing in the door.

"*Senorita* Davenant, let me aid you to dismount, and I would say to you that this is one of my ranches, and Valas and his wife, Elpita, will take the best of care of you."

"I thank you, sir," and Dolores permitted the Spaniard to aid her to alight.

She was tired out, hungry and anxious to rest. She saw that the cabin was by no means an uncomfortable one, had four rooms, and one she was ushered into which would certainly be pleasant quarters after her camp life the past few days.

Elpita had lighted a lamp, and was hustling about making things as cheerful as possible, and promised soon to have supper for her.

In a short while she had made her toilet as best she could, and the Mexican woman bade her enter the next room where a most tempting supper was spread before her.

There stood also the Spaniard, his face still concealed by his mask.

"*Senorita* Davenant," he began.

"How is it that you know me, sir?" she asked quickly.

"I know more of you, *Senorita* Davenant, than you would think, and, as I leave the ranch at once, I would say to you that you are in no danger here."

"In a day or two, perhaps a little longer, I shall return with one who is your friend, for I go to seek him."

"It came to me, how, it matters not now, that you were to be captured by a certain man and carried off, and I determined to prevent it."

"Unable to obtain the help I wanted, I went alone, arrived at the train just as the first repulse of your kidnappers was made, but knowing that there were others ready to seize you, I myself turned kidnapper and carried you off to save you from your foes."

"I went masked that I might not be known to those I might meet; but to you I do not fear to show my face, and I pledge you that in me you will find a friend."

"See, *senorita*! and let me introduce myself as Don Quevedo, a Spanish gentleman, now a *ranchero* in Texas!"

Dolores was struck by the courtly manner of the man, and gazed upon his handsome face with surprise.

He certainly appeared to be all that he represented himself; but who were these men who had intended kidnapping her?

What was all this mystery about?

These questions she asked Quevedo, and he replied in his gentle way:

"Now, I cannot tell you more, *senorita*; but soon the mystery shall all be cleared up, and, though I have been your kidnapper, you will discover that my seeming harsh treatment has been for your good."

"Make yourself comfortable here, I beg of you, and expect my return in a few days—yes, at my very earliest opportunity."

He bowed, without awaiting reply, and left the room, and a moment after, Dolores heard him ride away.

Just then Elpita entered.

"My good woman, who is that person?" she asked, as the Mexican woman began to spread before her dishes most tempting, hungry as she was.

"Don Quevedo, *senorita*, the master of this ranch."

"He is an honorable man, then, and a gentleman?"

"Ah, yes, *senorita*—most honorable and a perfect gentleman."

"Does he live here?"

"No, *senorita*, he dwells in Indianola and San Antonio, only coming here at times."

"And his family?"

"He is not married, *senorita*."

"Why does he wear a mask?"

"I never saw him do so before, *senorita*; but he said he had rescued you from those to whom he did not wish to be known—so, at least, he told my husband, Valas."

"I must bide my time, and await the clearing up this mystery," said Dolores with a sigh, and then she turned to the supper before her with a relish that surprised herself, under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THWARTED.

JAMES ENDICOTT having gone out with the two men, Prairie Pink and Cactus Kit, as the latter called himself in his disguise, waited with a patience worthy of a better cause, at the stand where the scouts had placed him.

He kept a lookout for the expected "braves," for he supposed that they were to disguise themselves as Indians, bearing with them their fair captive, and he was all ready to dash out to the rescue, firing his blank shots and appearing every inch a hero.

But time passed, and his patient waiting was not rewarded.

The thought occurred to him now for the first time that should he fail in this scheme of his, the money of old Adrian Davenant, which had come to him through such by-paths and crooked ways, would be but dross. What could it purchase for him, that would be worth purchasing? Strange reflection this, for such a sordid mind as that of James Endicott to be entertaining.

"Then the old thoughts, in which spoke the gambler and the scoundrel—the man he had become, not the true man he might have been—got the supremacy."

"Why should I take all this trouble, run all this risk for a girl who cares not for me, and who even has seemed to loathe and despise me, when her fortune is already mine? Why does this wild infatuation possess me? Can it be that it is fate which pursues me in this shape—that in this way I am blindly working out a retribution that may await me?"

So these contending thoughts at this critical moment began to harass him. It was passing strange that this passion on the part of one who hitherto had been incapable of any feeling that deserved the name, should have led him on, step by step, to the point at which he now found himself.

With a philosophy that was almost oriental in its grimness, he sat watching now for, he knew not what.

At last the noise of approaching hoofs burst upon his meditations, and he sprang to his horse and the next moment was out on the open plain.

To his astonishment the man who rode frantically toward him was alone and in citizen's dress. His sombrero was missing, and his features, thus unshaded, were recognizable at an unusual distance.

It was Maximo Legere, alias Monte Max.

The young gambler had thrown away the black mask he had donned for the occasion of the kidnapping, and was riding madly from the scene where his two companions in crime, the Mexicans, Juan and Jose, had fallen.

The recognition was mutual.

As soon as Max perceived Endicott, dreading he knew not what, he whirled his mustang, and started at a full gallop along a trail to the north. Endicott at once pursued, but seeing Max turn in his saddle as if to take aim, and recollecting that, acting upon the suggestion of Prairie Pink, his own pistols were not loaded, he slackened his speed.

With a curse at his own assinine stupidity in allowing himself to be in such a position with useless weapons, and feeling positive that the young Creole had been in some way working against his interests—for in no other way could he explain the flight of Monte Max—Endicott turned about, hesitating what course was best for him to pursue. It was plain that something which he had not anticipated had occurred.

While he hesitated, an advancing cavalcade burst upon his view, in the rear of which Endicott perceived immediately a wagon-train. That settled it with him.

Driving home his spurs, he headed in the direction of San Antonio, resolved that he would there await the arrival of Dolly Davenant, and

take his estimates, and lay his future plans from surrounding circumstances.

For the time being, he decided, it would be the wiser course for him not to put in an appearance at the hotel he had left, but to see what he could find out at some other resort in San Antonio in regard to the movements of the party who would soon be in the city.

That the scouts had played him false Endicott was fully convinced, and equally so that he could have no redress. More than this, his plot would now be made public, and though he had come to San Antonio ostensibly for his health, he felt that it would most probably prove decidedly unhealthy for him to remain in it.

But he was most concerned to know in what way the tables had been turned upon him, and this he was determined to discover before taking his flight from the Alamo City.

The defeated plotter began at length to see that he could expect to make no further discoveries while he kept aloof from the head center; so at all hazards he decided to return to the Menger House. There could be no possible use in putting off the evil day, and his continued absence might only make it worse for him, in the event of his schemes becoming, as it seemed only too certain they would do, public property.

The Menger House was unusually quiet when Endicott entered it after a hard ride back to town, and reached his apartment without attracting any attention. Once there, he seated himself and began to reflect upon the unexpected turn in the tide of his affairs. It did not take him long to decide on what must be done.

Clearly, and with as little delay as possible, he must return to New Orleans, and from thence North, to enjoy the wealth that his crime had secured to him—the Davenant fortune.

There was one comfort at least, and that was that they could not, do what they would, deprive him of that. Old Davenant's daughter might be, and probably was, lost to him forever; but old Davenant's money was his beyond the power of human courts.

He began his packing, cursing his fate all the while, and anathematizing himself for allowing his weakness for a girl, a marriage with whom might, after all, have subjected him to the severest consequences, as he was already married, to lead him on such a fool's errand.

Having come to the conclusion that he would make no effort to solve the mystery about the failure of his plot, and that he would start for the North at the earliest moment possible, Endicott ordered up a bottle of brandy with which to revive himself, and told the waiter to leave word at the office that he was not at the hotel.

His courage was of that order which caused him to shrink from a pursuit in which there was real danger to himself.

He had hired assassins to end the days of Dare Davenant, and he had paid gold that he might appear as a hero in rescuing Dolores from mock Indians, where he would appear to be as brave as a lion at bay.

But, by means unaccountable to him, his plans had miscarried, and when he had been ready to dash out to a bogus rescue he had discovered Monte Max, who, in turn discovering him had fled.

Thus, each had fled from the other, and Endicott sought refuge, as has been seen, in his rooms at the Menger.

What had become of Dolores, what the two scouts, Joe Pinkston and Cactus Kit had done, he did not know, and he was too cowardly to attempt to discover.

No, he had stayed long enough in the Lone Star State, and he owed it to himself to leave while yet he could.

Dolores, if really in danger, and thus in need of his aid, he would leave to her fate, while his destiny would be to return and spend old Davenant's money.

With this intention he drank deep of the brandy, and then, in a state of intoxication, retired for the night.

He awoke late, and was only revived by a couple of cocktails, after which he nibbled at his breakfast, and cursed the Fates that he could not at once leave town.

Suddenly there came a knock at his door.

Believing that it was the servant come to remove his breakfast-tray, he said:

"Come in!"

It was not a servant of the Menger who entered.

It was Quevedo, the chief of the Foxes of the Frio!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO OF A KIND.

ENDICOTT was positively startled at the appearance of the Spaniard entering his room.

He had not expected a visit from one who he knew had been the friend of Monte Max.

What could the man want?

He had left word at the office that he was "out," and here came Quevedo and found him "in."

"Well, sir, is there not some mistake?" he asked, haughtily.

"In what respect, *senor*?" was the calm reply of the visitor.

"Your coming to my room."

"None, senor, for I came to see you."
 "I have no business with you, sir."
 "You are mistaken."
 "Ha!"
 "Curb your anger, Senor Americano, for I come not as your foe but your friend."
 Endicott was alarmed.
 Was his plot known, and was bodily harm intended him?
 He knew that at times in Texas the citizens had a queer way of hanging a man and investigating charges against him afterward.
 Was he to be the subject of their attentions, and had Quevedo come to prove his friend.
 "You will oblige me, sir, by saying how I can serve you?" said Endicott coldly.
 The Spaniard locked the door, walked over near the American and calmly took a seat.
 Endicott's pistols were near, but still they held only blank cartridges.
 He eyed his visitor with dread, but awaited the ordeal.
 "Senor Endicott, I have said that I came as your friend?"
 "You said so?"
 "You ask how you can serve me?"
 "Yes."
 "I can serve you, senor."
 "Indeed?"
 "Yes."
 "How?"
 "You were expecting a lady relative to arrive in San Antonio?"
 "Ha! how know you this?"
 "She was coming by wagon-train from Indianola?"
 "You were well informed, sir."
 "Better than you think, senor."
 "Well."
 "Your relative has not arrived in San Antonio?"
 "I am well aware of that, sir, for had she arrived I would have known it."
 "Doubtless."
 "Do you know why she has not come, sir?"
 "I do."
 "I should like to be informed."
 "You shall be, senor."
 "At once?"
 "Yes."
 "Pray relieve my suspense regarding my dear relative."
 "She has been captured."
 "Captured?"
 "Yes, or kidnapped rather."
 "But by whom?"
 "A bann of road-gents that infest the trails."
 "Road-agents?"
 "Yes, they are known as the Foxes of the Frio."
 "I have heard of the scamps."
 "But do you mean that my relative is in the hands of this lawless band?"
 "I do, senor."
 "Is there no hope of her rescue?"
 "Senor, the Foxes are a peculiar lot.
 They would rather, if pressed by rescuers, put the beautiful lady to death, than have her taken from them."
 "But their motives in capturing her?"
 "The motive that sways the world, senor."
 "Love?"
 "Bah!"
 "I do not understand you then."
 "Gold, senor."
 "Ah!"
 "They wish a ransom, senor."
 "I see."
 "And hence I come to you as her kinsman."
 "But where is she?"
 "Hidden away in one of their retreats among the chaparrals."
 "How know you this?"
 "Senor, I was once the captive of these Foxes, and I paid a heavy ransom to get my freedom."
 "But I was well treated, and it came in my way afterward to serve their chief, and so he sent a messenger to me, as he has done before, asking me if I would ransom the young lady, or take measures to do so.
 "I knew through a young Mexican card-player here that she was your kinswoman, and so I came to you to offer to arrange the terms for you, well knowing that you would pay handsomely for her restoration to your care, to whom she was doubtless coming when kidnapped."
 "Yes, that is so, and I will do all in my power for her," and it flashed across the mind of Endicott that matters were not so bad after all.
 Here was a chance to get Dolores into his power, and by a means that she could not but appreciate.
 His mind at once changed about leaving San Antonio without at least another effort to play the hero before his cousin and place her under obligations to him, obligations which must lay the corner-stone of deepest gratitude in her heart toward him.
 So he said:
 "And you can arrange this for me, senor?"
 "I will undertake it, senor; but it must be upon conditions."
 "Well?"
 "The strictest secrecy between us."
 "I myself would prefer it so."
 "Then we are agreed."

"Yes, senor, upon that point."
 "And the ransom?"
 "Must be paid in gold."
 "How large a sum?"
 "A large one, senor, for the Foxes hold trumps and they know it."
 "What do you call a large sum?"
 "Fifteen thousand dollars."
 "I cannot pay it."
 "Then the lady will be the sufferer."
 "I have not such a sum with me."
 "You might arrange it through your bankers."
 "I could not do so unless I went North."
 "No, I could not pay so large a sum."
 "The lady will be the sufferer, then, senor."
 "Can you not arrange for less?"
 "I think not, senor."
 "I will pay ten thousand cash, but not a dollar more."
 "I can communicate with the chief, and will let you know, senor."
 "Stay, I will make it one thousand more, if the matter can be arranged to my liking."
 "How is that, senor?"
 Endicott was silent a few moments.
 His cunning brain was busy plotting deviltry.
 Quevedo gave him ample time to think, and at last Endicott said:
 "Senor?"
 "Yes, Senor Endicott?"
 "If you can arrange it as I wish I will give you eleven thousand dollars."
 "How do you wish it arranged, Senor?"
 "That the lady will be taken to a certain point, say by this chief of the bandits, and four of his men."
 "I can approach near, meet the chief and pay into his hands the gold agreed upon."
 "I will come with you alone, and, having paid the money, we will dash upon the party with the lady in charge, fire blank cartridges at them."
 "They are to return the fire, you are to fall from your horse as though wounded, and two of the bandits are to fall under my fire, while I dash up and rescue the lady, at once flying rapidly with her from the scene."
 "And why all this mock heroism, senor?"
 "To be candid, I love the lady, and I am her nearest male protector; but she is romantic, and I wish to win her love thus."
 "Do you understand, my dear senor?"
 "Perfectly."
 "And will aid me in this?"
 "I will, under the circumstances, senor; but I will go on the scene disguised, for I wish not the bandits even to know me in the affair."
 "I will wear a mask, in fact, and the chief alone will know me as I am."
 "But I may as well tell you that I know the chief will not accept your terms."
 "He must."
 "You cannot force him to do so."
 "I will give no more."
 "Let me at least be able to offer twelve thousand dollars as an *ultimatum*, senor."
 "Well, I'll say that much, if you cannot arrange it otherwise; but make it ten thousand as the first offer."
 "I will, senor; but when shall this payment be made?"
 "At the earliest moment possible."
 "I shall attend to it with the utmost dispatch, senor," was the reply of the cunning chief, and, after a glass of *pulque* with the American he left the room, a sinister smile coming upon his face as soon as the door closed behind him.
 "It shall all as he wishes," he said, grimly.
 But there was something back of his words.

CHAPTER XXXV. A CUNNING FOX.

QUEVEDO was a man of remarkable strategies.
 He had decided to get Dolores Davenant into his power, and he had done so.
 And more, he had accomplished it in a bold manner, that showed her that he was a courageous man.
 More, he had led her to believe that he was an honest man, acting only for her good.
 With Endicott he had made a satisfactory arrangement, for he was certainly sure of the twelve thousand dollars promised.
 After getting that he could act to suit himself.
 Having accomplished this much, he went on his way rejoicing.
 First, he mounted his horse and left the town, going on the same trail by which he had entered it.
 After a ride of a number of miles, he came to a chaparral, which he boldly entered.
 It seemed almost impenetrable in its thickness, and no one who was not well acquainted with its secret trails would have dared venture far into its depths.
 But Quevedo seemed to know just which way to go, or rather his intelligent horse did, for he went along without the slightest pull upon the bridle, or any guidance from his master.
 Still had his rider observed him taking a wrong trail, he would quickly have set him right.
 In the very depths of the chaparral the bandit

chief halted, for suddenly came an invitation to do so.
 It was rather a command, for the words rung out sharply:
 "Halt, or speak quick!"
 "Frio!"
 The chief uttered the word promptly, and then came the command:
 "Advance!"
 The man rode on and soon passed into an open space.
 It was a wild and picturesque scene that met his gaze.
 It was a bivouac.
 But it was a bivouac of lawless men.
 In very truth it was the temporary resort of the Foxes of the Frio.
 There were a score of men there, and half as many more horses.
 The latter were either saddled, or bore packs, and were staked out to feed upon what they could find in the chaparral.
 The men were grouped together around a fire, on which they were cooking their afternoon meal.
 Several trails led off from the opening, and in each one of these a guard was stationed.
 The men were a wild looking lot, reckless—and bearded and desperate in fact.
 Some were Mexicans, others Texans, several full-blooded Indians and a few half-breeds.
 They were dressed in costumes varying from red-skin attire, to the picturesque Mexican garb and buckskin suit.
 But all were armed with rifles, revolvers and knives.
 In fact they were a dangerous lot of men to meet upon a trail unless they were your friends.
 As the chief entered the opening in the chaparral they turned and saluted him, while one of the group advanced to meet him.
 Before entering the chaparral Quevedo had placed over his face a mask.
 It was a precaution he took, and he made it his secret boast to Monte Max that but two men of his band knew his face, and they were Jose and Juan.
 The man who advanced toward him greeted him politely and said:
 "We are here, Senor Capitan, as you see."
 "Yes, and I have some work for you, Martinez."
 "We are ready, senor, and glad, for the soldiers have made it hot for us of late, while the booty we have gotten has been of little value."
 "Well, times will be better now."
 "But I will tell you what I wish."
 "Yes, capitan."
 "You are to go to my Chaparral Ranch on to-morrow about noon, and take with you four men."
 "Yes, senor."
 "You will find there, under the care of Valas and his wife, a young American lady, and you are to say that your chief has accepted for her a certain ransom, and you are to conduct her to the one who is to receive her."
 "I understand, senor."
 "You are to take her by the lower trail toward San Antonio and halt at the Silver Spring, do you understand?"
 "I do, senor."
 "You and each of your men are to have one weapon loaded only with powder."
 "Mind you, no bullets, and you are to be careful to have that weapon alone in your belts, for there must be no mistake."
 "Yes, senor."
 "While at the spring I will advance with an American senor, and discovering you I will charge upon you, firing as we come, for we will use pistols too that have no bullets."
 "No chance of mistake, senor, for you are a dead shot?"
 "None, Martinez."
 "We wish to appear to rescue the lady from you, and I will fall from my horse, as though killed, and you and two of your men must do the same, the other two dashing away, while the Americano is to ride up, seize the bridle-rein of the lady's horse and carry her off, as though he had rescued her, do you see?"
 "I do, senor."
 "But, Martinez?"
 "Yes, senor?"
 "You are to have half a dozen of your men a mile away, lying in ambush, and you are to dash out upon the American and the lady."
 "If you kill him, remember, it will make no difference, and there may be good picking off of him, for he carries a well-filled purse and wears diamonds and a handsome watch and chain."
 "I understand, senor."
 "And, Martinez, I wish you to leave but two men with the lady, when I pretending only to have been wounded, will rush after them and boldly rescue her from them."
 "Do you see my plot, Martinez?"
 "You wish to appear as the lady's rescuer, capitan?"
 "I do."
 "I will arrange it, senor."
 "And Martinez?"
 "Yes, senor?"
 "Do you know the grove of mesquites where stands the tree that was struck by lightning?"

"I do, senor."
 "Well, Martinez, here is a paper that I wish you to fasten upon it."
 "It reads, as you see:
 "Leave the gold here in the hollow of this tree.
 "If you do not do so a signal will be made to those in charge of the senorita, and your coming will be in vain. F. of F."
 "I will place it there, senor, as you request."
 "It is a blind to make the man who comes with me deposit his gold as ransom."
 "Then we are to go on and make the pretended attack upon you, so that the American senorita will believe that he is her rescuer, risking his life against great odds to do so."
 "I hope I have made all clear to you, Martinez?"
 "Perfectly, Senor Capitan."
 "Very well, now I will leave you, and tomorrow when we meet I will have orders for your future movements."
 "I hope you will get a rich ransom for the lady, Senor Capitan, and that we can start off on some trails that will pay us well, for the men are grumbling of late."
 "Let them grumble, for they cannot expect to have their lives all sunshine."
 "Remember, afternoon to-morrow at the Silver Springs."
 "Adios."
 So saying Quevedo mounted his horse, and with a salute to his men rode away from the camp of the Foxes of the Frio, returning toward San Antonio.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TRAILED TO DEATH.

THE prologue of my romance has shown that the clever game of Quevedo, the chief of the Foxes of the Frio, was carried out.

The gold was deposited, and he got it, and the attack upon the outlaws was a success, for James Endicott dashed off with Dolores.

But when Endicott saw the party dash out upon them, heard the whistle of bullets and saw the horse of Dolores fall, his fright got the better of him and he fled at the utmost speed of the animal he rode.

He left Dolores Davenant again to her fate, while he saved himself and made all haste to return to San Antonio.

This left Quevedo master of the situation, for he got Endicott's gold, had the pleasure of knowing that Dolores Davenant believed him to be her rescuer, and she was once more at his ranch under his protection.

The next day he left San Antonio and started out for his ranch.

He had seen nothing of Endicott, and supposed that he had decamped, not caring to face him again after his cowardly flight, for he well knew that he, Quevedo, was only shamming death when he fell from his horse and must soon return to the town.

"I will bring the lady to San Antonio, place her in pleasant quarters and win her love."

"Then I shall have her fortune, and can afford to leave this wild land and turn gentleman."

So said Don Quevedo, the Captain of the Foxes, and mounting his horse he started for his ranch out among the chaparrals.

But there was something afoot that might thwart the game of the outlaw chief.

This was the movements of those who had been with the Bilberry wagon-train.

When Texas Thad, his brother scouts, the major and the two boys saw that they might as well attempt to capture the wind as Monte Max, for he was the fugitive who had fled when Jose and Juan fell under the shots of Buck and Bud, they returned to the train.

Then it was that they all discovered their mistake in leaving it, for Marm Bilberry had found her tongue and quickly told how Dolores Davenant had been captured by a masked horseman.

The two daughters had a grieved look, as though they felt slighted at the bandits having left them; but Texas Thad and his two companions at once drew apart to have a talk.

Each one of the three, the mother and her two daughters, as well as Cudge, were questioned as to the horseman.

Cudge was too frightened to know anything, but the girls remembered much about the masked horseman and described him.

Then they pointed out the direction he had taken, and Prairie Pink said:

"Pards, we must take his trail sure as shootin'."

"I'm with yer, pard, tooth an' toe-nail," responded Butternut Ben.

"An' I'm along you bet, for ther major kin hustle along inter San Antonio now 'thout no guide, fer he's got a perfecter in them two boys."

"We'll scoop a hole fer ther carkisses o' them dead Greasers, pards, start ther train San Antoniowards and then we'll strike ther trail o' that devil as hes got ther purtiest gal in Texas in his claws," and Texas Thad spoke with a vehemence that showed his deadly earnestness.

Half an hour after the Bilberry train had pulled out from the scene of attack, on its way to San Antonio, and the three scouts, having buried the two dead Mexicans, started off on the trail of Quevedo and his beautiful captive.

Slowly but surely they tracked the bandit

chief, until they came to his ranch in the chaparrals.

But Dolores was not there, and Valas told them that she had left for San Antonio half an hour ago with his master.

This was true, for the bandit chief, true to his word, had ridden out to the ranch after the young girl, having searched for her pleasant quarters in town.

He went along at a slow pace, and Dolores had perfect trust in his honesty, though still he wore his mask. Just, however, as he neared the point where he purposed turning off the trail to the southwest he was startled by the sudden appearance of two horsemen riding rapidly along on the trail toward San Antonio. Before Quevedo had time to decide on the course that was best for him to pursue the order to halt came in a clear and decided tone. Even at a distance his character and object had been recognized by the approaching equestrians. The only safety now was in flight, he well knew, masked as he was.

Wheeling suddenly, according to his original purpose, the bandit chief drove deep his spurs; but at that moment a flash, followed by the report of a rifle, varied the scene, and the noble steed of the outlaw, plunged upward madly and then rolled over on the ground.

Extricating himself from the animal, Quevedo drew his pistol, but, ere he could take aim, a second shot met its mark in his breast, and Antonio Quevedo, the Captain of the Foxes of the Frio, had gone to his last account.

As he raised the fainting form of the captive maiden from the sward on which she lay, the first of the two horsemen, who had dismounted for that purpose, caught a glance at the pale face partly veiled by the rich wealth of her unconfused hair.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "It is she—Dolores Davenant!"

A few minutes later a party of three men came along. They were Texas Thad, followed by his pards, Butternut Ben and Prairie Pink. The horsemen who had rescued Dolores were Vivian Fairfax and his guide, who had followed the trail from Indianola.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DOUBLE RETRIBUTION.

ENDICOTT, after his cowardly flight from Dolores, returned to San Antonio and kept his room at the hotel for some time. Determined to leave town, however, he at last descended to the office, and taking care this time to go armed, the first person whom he encountered was the man who he thought had betrayed him—the Creole.

Monte Max had been told, a few minutes previous, that Endicott had not returned to the hotel, and had at once decided in his own mind that the Bostonian had not deemed it safe to return; he, therefore, without much trepidation sought that popular hostelry on business of his own.

The greeting of Endicott to his Creole friend could not be said to be wanting in warmth.

"Traitor!" he hissed.

Monte Max did not contradict him. He replied by merely drawing his pistol.

Endicott was not slow in following suit, and before the movements of the two men had attracted any great attention, several shots had been exchanged, the proximity of the parties and the excitement of both preventing at the first any serious consequences.

By the time, however, that any practical interference had been exerted, the combatants were past doing any more harm to themselves or others.

Monte Max lay upon the floor, apparently already dead; while a couple of Endicott's hotel acquaintances supported the latter to a lounge.

It was now dusk in the office, and the noise and bustle had attracted several from their rooms as well as from the street.

Among the former was a young man who had arrived a few hours before, and having registered and been assigned to his room, had remained there until the first report of the pistols brought him precipitately upon the scene.

The now ghastly face of the wounded and bleeding Endicott seemed to charm the gaze of the stranger. He said nothing, but stood a few paces from the man on the lounge, watching him intently. A surgeon had been hastily summoned, and, having made an examination, had glanced around, merely shaking his head.

This was no sealed verdict. All present, including the wounded man, saw and read it.

The eyes of Endicott searched the spacious apartment, and at last rested upon the face of the stranger.

The latter now came up to the side of the couch and spoke. It was but to call a name—

"Harry Hatrick!"

The dying man started.

"I am not—yes, I was!" he said, excitedly.

"But you—who are you?"

"I am Vivian Fairfax!"

"I am glad!" exclaimed Endicott. "You may not believe me, but I am. I am glad to see you."

He then closed his eyes, and remained for some time silent.

Vivian Fairfax did not withdraw his gaze from his dying enemy for a moment.

Presently, James Endicott spoke again.

"I know what you would say to me, Fairfax," he whispered. "I know all the reproaches and the curses you would cast upon me were I not as I am. But I am here, and you know—"

"That you are dying," said Vivian.

"Dying, yes; and it is best, perhaps—best for Dolores Davenant, for all will now be hers—best, too, for some one else."

"I know whom you would speak of, Fairfax. Name her, man! Don't be afraid. It is only I who should be afraid of speaking her name."

"You are right," answered Vivian, sternly.

"It is Rosalind. It is on her account that I am here. It is of her that I would compel you to speak while space is left you—of her whom you have wronged!"

"Wronged? Yes. But not as you have supposed—not as I would have wronged one whom I loved as I never loved little Rose."

"Do not dare to speak of her in that way!" exclaimed Fairfax, fiercely.

"Why not?" asked Endicott, with something of his old spirit; "why not? *She is my wife!*"

"Your wife?"

"Yes, and has been so since the evening that she left her home on the Hudson. Poor Rose! She has had enough to complain of; but she is my wife, and I have never had another."

"Thank God!"

Just this ejaculation and Vivian Fairfax knelt by the side of the man whose life he had sought.

"Tell her," said Endicott, in a low voice; "but no! Tell her nothing. She will care only to hear that I am dead. Tell Dolly Davenant that I confess to all that she may hear—yes, and more! She cannot hate me worse than she does when she knows all."

"I compassed the death of her brother, Dare Davenant—I am his murderer!"

"Dare Davenant!" exclaimed the clerk at the desk. "I have a telegram from a Dare Davenant securing rooms for himself and a lady with her maid. *The lady is Miss St. Evremont, the actress.*"

The dying man actually smiled his gratitude. "Then it is not so bad after all," he said.

"Listen, Vivian," and Fairfax bent lower, "Rose St. Evremont is my wife and your sister Rosalind!"

Just then Maximo Legere revived for the moment; but it was only the last flicker of the candle in the socket. His glance sought that of his recent antagonist; and with an effort he spoke. The words sounded strangely at such a time.

"It was a desperate game, Endicott; but I thought we held the cards. The scouts were the traitors however, not I; and they took the trick."

"I am glad of it now," said the poor stranded wreck of humanity, in a firm voice.

With a wretched attempt at wit that was ghastly in the extreme, Monte Max sneered:

"You were euchered, old man!"

"Yes," said Endicott, quietly, "but it was a game of cut-throat eucher," came the hoarse response, and almost with the words, James Endicott breathed his last.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FLOOD TIDE.

ROSE ENDICOTT bore with her to the distant North the remains of the man of whom it might be truly said that, "nothing in life became him like the leaving of it." There she laid him to rest with his ancestors, and knelt forgivingly over the grave of him who had made such a sad shipwreck of his life and came so near wrecking hers.

In time she became the loved and loving wife of Dare Davenant, and the memory of James Endicott is now but that of a troubled dream.

The home of the Fairfaxes is bright, far more so than ever of yore. Happy and handsome children call Vivian father, and no prouder wife and mother can be found in any of the stately mansions on the glorious Hudson—as there is none happier or more beautiful—than Mrs. Vivian Fairfax, whom we have known as Dolly Davenant.

Thus far neither Dare nor Vivian have revisited the Lone Star State, though their respective wives frequently express a resolution some day to do so. But they keep up a friendly correspondence with the friends whom they made while there, and Dolly Fairfax is seldom better pleased than when she has received tidings of the welfare of her quaint benefactors, the scouts, who, in turn, cherish for her the warmest feelings of regard.

Marm Carraway and even the Bilberrys are not forgotten; and it is gratifying to know that the young ladies—though not "captivated" by bandits—have yet achieved the great desire of their hearts as well as of their mother's. Also that Buck and Ben bid fair to fulfill the promise of their youth, and have developed into brave and hardy young rancheros.

But fonder memories will ever cluster around Texas Thad and his pards, who are still on the trail; and many blessings go up daily from grateful and pure hearts, calling down, we trust, others in abundance upon them.

END.

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